

Chief
Catholic
Devotions

By
Louis
Boncard



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THE CHIEF CATHOLIC
DEVOTIONS

The Chief Catholic Devotions.

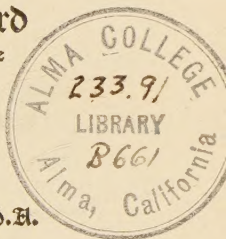
By

Louis Boucard

Vicaire à Saint-Sulpice

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PREFACE

PEOPLE sometimes ask: Why should we pay such attention to devotions? Are not the essential duties of Christianity enough? Why spend so much time on a host of practices which are all very well for children and for those with plenty of leisure?

Such questions betray an ignorance of the benefits, and even of the nature, of devotions. The following pages have been written in the hope of removing this ignorance.

The substance of them was given first of all in a series of addresses to men at Saint-Sulpice. Those addresses were intended to set forth the teaching of the Church on the Chief Catholic Devotions, and to give an account of the principal practices connected with them.

In their present form the following chapters appeal generally to adults and to the young of both sexes, and they are also meant

to be helpful to the truly devout. They show that the Chief Devotions, when stripped of the superstitious and sterile formalism to which they are sometimes bound, are far from being either petty or unprofitable; that they are most reasonable, elevating, and beneficial for everybody.

May this little book remove many prejudices, giving to many souls a true taste for devotions rightly understood, and thus enabling them to gain more good for themselves and more glory for God !

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THE CHIEF CATHOLIC DEVOTIONS

CHAPTER I

DEVOTION

A DISSERTATION on Devotions would be unintelligible without some preliminary study of Devotion properly so-called.

There is, indeed, a very great difference between Devotions and Devotion; but the two words are so much alike that their meaning is often confused together. Let us therefore begin by ascertaining clearly the significance of each.

Hence in this opening chapter we shall consider what Devotion is, its excellence, and why we should make it our concern.

I.

The things of the spirit are those which are naturally the least understood by the world, and as to devotion the world generally entertains erroneous notions and uses inaccurate speech. It has often been observed that too

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few, even among Catholics, have a true and thorough comprehension of devotion.

“Aurelius,” says St. Francis of Sales, “used to paint all his faces with the expression and features of the women he loved; thus does everyone portray devotion according to his own feelings and fancies. A person who is given to fasting thinks himself very devout if he fasts, though his heart may be full of hatred, and, while he pushes sobriety to the point of not allowing his tongue to touch a drop of wine, or even of water, he will not shrink from dipping it deep into his neighbour’s blood by means of evil-speaking and calumny. Another will consider himself devout because he says a long string of prayers every day, although his tongue is afterwards let loose in all sorts of aggravating, arrogant, and hurtful remarks in the presence of his neighbours and servants; another will readily take out his purse to give alms to the poor, but will make no effort to extract any gentleness from his heart for the forgiveness of his enemies; another will pardon his enemies, but cannot be brought to pay his creditors, except by force of law. All these people are commonly reckoned to be devout while they are not really so at all. The men of Saul went to David’s house in quest of him. Michal put an image to bed and covered it with his clothes, and made them think it was David himself, asleep and ill. Thus many

people wrap themselves about with a number of the outward practices of devotion, and everybody regards them as truly devout and spiritual; but, in reality, they are only images and ghosts of devotion."

In many persons devotion consists in an invariable series of vocal prayers. They are quite seriously upset if they miss making a sign of the cross, or omit a decade of the rosary or an habitual invocation; and yet they do not worry about the obligations of justice, the finer requirements of charity, and the rules of prudence, modesty, and humility. Such were the hypocritical Pharisees, whom our Lord rebuked for straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel.

We should not try to reduce devotion to formulas and outward exercises. However worthy of respect, however profitable such practices may be, either for expressing or for exciting devotion, they are not devotion, for the latter is an inner life which tends to promote an all-round virtue.

Nor does devotion consist in pleasantness, sweetness, consolations, and perceptible warmth of heart, which move us to tears and to sighs, and give us an agreeable relish for certain spiritual exercises. No, to quote St. Francis of Sales once more, "devotion and all that [*i.e.*, the above emotions] are far from being one and the same thing, for many who experience these feelings of sweetness and

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consolation are nevertheless full of evil dispositions and vices, and consequently have no real love of God, far less any true devotion."*

That which increases or lessens our moral value is that for which we are responsible, that which depends upon us; but having an impression of sensible devotion is a thing which does not always depend upon us. Having such impressions is very pleasant indeed: if we have them, let us be able to profit by them; but if we are without them, let us not be cast down, as long as their absence is not due to any evil will on our part. Whether we experience any sensible love of God, any attraction for duty, or, on the contrary, dryness of spirit and the difficulty of doing right, it matters not; that is no criterion of the existence of devotion, or of its degree.

Devotion, piety, or fervour, for the three words are fundamentally synonymous, means spiritual diligence in embracing readily and generously all that pleases God. "I do always what is pleasing to My Father"—such was the device of Jesus, and such too must be the device of the devout. And in trying to discover the good pleasure of God, the devout display alacrity and eagerness; indeed, the very word "devotion" suggests an idea of zeal and generosity.

"True and living devotion, Philothea,

* *Introduction to a Devout Life*, iv, 13.

implies the love of God, and hence it is nothing but a true love of God, and yet it is not merely love as such: for, so far as divine love adorns our souls, it is called grace, and makes us pleasing to the divine Majesty; and so far as it gives us strength to do good, it is called charity; but, when it is so far perfected that it not only makes us do good, but makes us act with care and frequency and alacrity, then it is called devotion. Ostriches never fly; fowls fly, yet they fly heavily, very low, and only rarely; but eagles, doves, and swallows fly often, quickly, and high up: thus sinners fly not at all in God, but all their goings are on the earth and for the earth; those who are good, but not also devout, fly in God by their good works, and yet they fly only rarely, slowly, and heavily; the devout fly in God often, readily, and high up."

"In fine, devotion is nothing else than a kind of spiritual nimbleness and liveliness, whereby charity performs its works in us, or we do them for its sake, with alacrity and love; and, as it pertains to charity to make us carry out God's commandments at all times and in all places, so does it pertain to devotion to make us keep them with readiness and diligence. And this is why he who does not obey all the divine commandments cannot be reckoned either good or devout, since, in order to be good, a man must possess charity,

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and in order to be devout, he must not only have charity, but also a great alacrity and readiness in charitable works."

"And inasmuch as devotion consists in a certain degree of excellent charity, not only does it render us quick, active, and diligent in keeping all God's commandments, but furthermore it urges us to do all the good works we can readily and lovingly, even though they are in no wise commanded, but only counselled or suggested."*

In all things, at all times, on all great occasions, and in arduous duties as well as in lesser matters, the devout soul seeks above all else to be pleasing to God, and to testify its love to Him. It is this faithful and generous attachment of the human will to the divine that constitutes the very essence of true devotion.

Clearly, such an attachment as this urges one to prayer, to pious exercises, to special devotions, and to the use of the sacraments: a true lover of God feels the need of holding intercourse with Him, and of praising Him and glorifying Him by outward and inward worship. He also knows that divine assistance is indispensable for realizing the ideal to which he aspires, and such knowledge supplies him with a further motive for prayer and for using the sacraments.

But the soul's attachment to the will of

* *Introduction to a Devout Life*, i, 1.

God urges it also quite as much to action. It understands the high obligation which binds it to please God in its whole life, and to win other souls to Him by its apostolic zeal.

Thus, true devotion is a form of religion and of the love of God, but it is their highest and also their most active form. It does not rest satisfied with just what is essential, with what is strictly necessary for gaining eternal salvation; it is the portion of those who really understand what God is, and what is due to Him; it uplifts the devout to the loftiest regions of the moral and spiritual life.

II.

How priceless and supremely profitable is devotion to all plainly appears from the foregoing sketch of it.

What can be more beautiful and beneficial in this world than to fulfil as far as possible the fundamental object of our existence, the end for which we have been created and put on earth, the love and the service of God? If devotion to one's family, to one's country, to mankind is a grand and noble thing, how much more grand and noble is true devotion, devotion to God!

Moreover, what does full justice in all its integrity demand? Is it satisfied with any kind of love we may offer to God, or does it

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require that zealous love which constitutes devotion ?

Whoever we may be, and wherever we may be, have we not received all that we have from God ? Is He not our absolute Lord ? Was He not the first to love us, and that without measure ? Has He not given Himself to us ? And since He loves us with a boundless love, is it not right that our love, too, for Him should be boundless ?

Therefore, even if we could derive no benefit from it, we ought to wish for devotion and to do our best to practise it with all our heart.

But, in the words of St. Paul, "godliness (devotion) is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."*

As for the life to come, it is plain that we shall be rewarded in proportion to our merits. The greater our generosity here, the greater our everlasting happiness hereafter. Oh, how insignificant will appear the sacrifices and efforts we have had to make to become fervent when we compare them with the higher degree of glory and happiness which will be their eternal recompense ! We ought not to be indifferent—as some are—about the rank which may be one day assigned to us in heaven. The higher our position then, the more will God be glorified

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

eternally by us, and the happier shall we be everlastingly: such are two considerations we ought not to forget.

Still less should it be forgotten that for some souls devotion is indispensable for winning eternal salvation. Doubtless, we may get to heaven, if we are essentially in the state of grace, free from all grave and unforgiven sin; but how many people by neglecting lesser faults fall by degrees into those that are greater and greater; and thus, because they are without generosity, either compromise or lose their eternal salvation.

The benefits of devotion for the life to come are perfectly plain. They are neither so many nor so important for the life that now is, but here none the less are they to be found in their measure and degree.

Certainly, devotion does not guarantee success and temporal benefits in this life. Although it has been said that "virtue is often in reality the best of all investments," yet virtue does not assure anyone of earthly happiness.

Still, those who are hostile to devotion strive in vain to show that it does not affect life in any practical way, and that, even from the point of view of morals, it has rather an enervating effect on such as give themselves up to it, making them pusillanimous and barren in every way, so that they are

thereby prevented from fulfilling their destiny.

Of course, we sometimes meet with the so-called devout, who do not carry out even the most elementary duties of purity, diligence, and charity; and their devotion makes them neither more hard-working, nor less selfish, nor less eaten up with pride. But this is just because such persons have nothing of devotion about them save its externals; they are only sham devotees. So is it with those whose so-called devotion makes them disagreeable, depressing, and tiresome. "A Saint who is sad is a sad Saint," as the saying runs. If anyone's devotion has no amiability about it, it is contrary to the love of one's neighbour, and therefore, on that ground, it runs counter to the love and the will of God.

Even those who are earnest in their cultivation of devotion are unfortunately subject to the miseries and weaknesses of humanity (and who is not so in this world?), and they realize their ideals more or less completely; but by their devotion they are ever more and more encouraged in the all-round fulfilment of duty, as individuals, as members of families, as units of society.

Look at the Saints; they were always models in this respect. What wonderful moral results they have achieved, and that without detriment to any of their other good qualities!

The intellectual works of St. Augustine and St. Ambrose lost none of their fineness because those writers were Saints; St. Louis was just as great a king, although he was always striving after perfection; St. Francis of Sales had no less charm of manner in his social relationships because he constantly did his best to put into practice what he advised others to do in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*.

To quote Bossuet: "Of a truth, dear brethren, men's minds have been seized by an idea which is intolerably mistaken, that no one can live in the world and be devout. Those who incessantly complain that one cannot work out one's salvation in the world give the lie to Jesus and His gospel. Jesus declared Himself to be the Saviour of all men; and thus He tells us that there is no position in life beyond the reach of His blessing, and no one to whom He has not laid open the path to heaven. For, as St. John Chrysostom has admirably said, the teaching of the gospel is weak indeed, if it cannot keep order in towns, and govern communities and the social intercourse of men. If, in order to live as Christians, men must give up family life and human social intercourse, and go to dwell in deserts and in hidden and inaccessible places, kingdoms will be overthrown and towns left in desolation. This is no part of the plan of the Son of God;

on the contrary, He bids His disciples let their light shine before men. He does not say: In the woods and the wildernesses, in solitary and uninhabited mountains. He says: In towns, and among men; there they must so let the light shine that their heavenly Father may be glorified. Let us then praise those who withdraw, but let us not discourage those who stay amongst us: if these do not practise virtue, let them blame only their own cowardice, and not put it down to their occupations, or to the world, or to the attractions of the court, or to the business of civil life.”*

“When God made the world,” says St. Francis of Sales,† “He bade the fruit-trees bring forth their fruit, each according to its kind; and He bids all Christians, who are the living trees of the Church, bring forth fruits worthy of religion, according to their state of life or vocation. Devotion must be practised differently by the gentleman, the artisan, the manservant, the prince, the widow, the maiden, and the married woman; and not only so, but the exercise of devotion must be suited to the strength, the business, and the duties of each individual. Philothea, I beg you tell me: would it be right for a bishop to want to live in solitude like a Carthusian? And, if married people wanted

* Bossuet: *Panégérique de Saint François de Sales*.

† *Introduction to the Devout Life*, i, 3.

to be as poorly off as Capuchins, and the workman were all day in church like a religious, and the religious ran the risk of all kinds of encounters in doing good to his neighbour like a bishop: would not that sort of devotion be absurd, disorderly, and intolerable? Yet this is a mistake that is often made, and the world, not seeing the difference, or refusing to see the difference, between devotion and the indiscreetness of those who think they are devout, murmurs against and blames devotion, which has nothing to do with such irregularities."

"No, Philothea, true devotion never mars anything, but rather improves everything; and if it run counter to anyone's lawful vocation, then it is no doubt false. The bee, says Aristotle, extracts its honey from the flowers without doing them any harm, leaving them as entire in their freshness as when it first found them: but true devotion does still more, for not only does it not in the least spoil any sort of vocation or business, but on the contrary it adorns and embellishes them. All sorts of precious stones, when cast into honey, become all the more sparkling, whatever their colour may be; and everybody becomes all the more pleasing in his vocation with the help of devotion; the bosom of the family becomes all the more peaceful, the love of husband and wife more sincere, the work of the prince more con-

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scientious, and all sorts of employments more sweet and delightful."

"It is not only an error but a heresy to want to banish a life of devotion from the ranks of soldiers, from the workshop, from the courts of princes, from the households of married folks. It is true, Philothea, that purely contemplative, monastic, and religious devotion cannot be exercised in such vocations, but besides these three sorts of devotion there are several others adapted to perfect those who live in these worldly callings. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David, Job, Tobias, Sara, Rebecca and Judith are there to speak for the Old Testament; and, as for the New, St. Joseph, Lydia, and St. Crispin were perfectly devout in their shops; St. Anne, St. Martha, St. Monica, Aquila, Priscilla, in their housekeeping; Cornelius, St. Sebastian, St. Maurice, in their military calling; Constantine, Helena, St. Louis, Blessed Amé, and St. Edward, in the position of kings and dukes. Several, indeed, have even lost perfection in retirement, though this is so desirable for perfection, and have kept it amidst the crowd, which appears so far from favourable to perfection. In whatever position we may be, we can and ought to aspire towards the perfect life."

Would that we might give the world an example of true devotion, not confined to the

practices of piety, but such as orders our whole life in accordance with the principles we profess.

As long as the world sees no difference between those who pray and those who neglect prayer, it will simply be sceptical as to the real significance of devotion. If it observes some who become narrow and pusillanimous through their so-called devotion, or others hiding shameful shortcomings under the cloak of religion, we can understand why it is tempted to blaspheme. But if it perceives that devotion is clearly the source of the noblest feelings, the most generous endeavours, the most patient endurance of suffering, of increased uprightness and kindness and charity; it will then appreciate the advantages of being really devout, the importance of relying upon religion if we are to make any true moral progress; and thus we shall fulfil the best of all apostolates while glorifying God and saving our own souls.

CHAPTER II

DEVOTIONS

So far we have been dealing with devotion: let us now consider what devotions are, their chief benefits, their lawfulness, and certain abuses of them to be avoided.

I.

There is an immense difference between devotion and devotions. Whereas devotion is nothing but generosity and fervour in the service of God, devotions are practices of religion in which inward piety loves to find expression, and with the help of which it endeavours to develop the powers of the soul, and to secure various spiritual, and even temporal, benefits.

Among devotions, some are addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ, others to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to Angels or to Saints, but each of them has some specific outward manifestation, and receives its character from its own particular object.

Take, for instance, the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Its object is the physical

Heart of Jesus Christ, the symbol of His love for men; its practices are invocations and other pious acts by means of which we try to set our hearts in harmony with His. Again, take the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as Our Lady of the Rosary. We think of Mary, and the practice we use to honour our heavenly Mother and to obtain her favour is the recitation of "Hail Mary" along with meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary. Or, again, take the devotion addressed to any Saint. We desire to honour this particular Saint, and from him to obtain some temporal or spiritual benefit. Therefore we invoke him, address certain prayers to him, and do him homage in other ways.

II.

Every one of us often needs special favours, either in the temporal, or in the spiritual sphere. We may obtain them by addressing ourselves directly to God; but it is a fact of experience that God loves to see us have recourse, in such circumstances, to the various devotions approved by the Church. Often He accords signal and extraordinary benefits in return for some particular exercise in honour perhaps of the Sacred Heart, or of His own Blessed Mother, or of the Angels or the Saints. And we know by faith that every prayer is answered in some way, and

that every devotional practice obtains some heavenly benefit.

Moreover, to many of these practices the Church has attached the most invaluable indulgences. And when we know how important it is to gain these indulgences, that is enough to encourage us not to neglect such devotions.

Furthermore, do not our devotional practices bring us into communion with the objects of these devotions? For, either such exercises of piety enable us to pray by means of the forms they enjoin upon our use, and in that case they set in motion the religious feelings of the heart and effect that true uplifting of the soul which is real religion in spirit and in truth, or else they necessitate sacrifices which, by immolating our sensual and selfish tendencies to the call of duty, cause us to advance in character towards perfection. When our practices of devotion are not mechanically performed, when they are really spiritual acts, they powerfully contribute towards our progress in virtue.

If their only direct result were the pious exercises that are their distinctive mark, that is to say, prayer and the use of the sacraments, devotions would be even then most profitable and salutary. For these pious exercises are a homage we owe to God; and he who does them thereby makes protestation to God of his love, glorifying Him and

promising to become ever more and more devoted to Him. Thus is God honoured by them. By means of them, too, while obtaining other heavenly favours man receives the supernatural energy he requires in order to run freely in the path of duty.

What happens to the moral life of those who abstain from all religious practices? With regard to this, experience has most significant lessons to teach us. For, although one may meet with some who, though they are without any Christian habits, persevere in moral uprightness to a certain extent, yet such cases are exceptional. But, unhappily, as a general rule, a man's moral life is a failure as soon as the passions are left without any religious restraint and the will is no longer sustained by prayer. Who has not remarked in his own case that his moral life rises along with his religious life, and that it droops or fails entirely when he neglects or omits the fulfilment of the practices of religion? Who, again, has not noticed the struggles of the young crowned with splendid moral victories as long as they were true to prayer and the sacraments, and on the contrary how wretchedly they slip and fall on the dangerous slope when they are no longer bound by the faithful observance of Christian duties? Do we not see honourable conduct flourishing amidst those peoples which sincerely cultivate piety, and, on the other

hand, do we not mark how vice abounds wherever religion has lost its sway? Nor is it to be wondered at that those who take upon themselves to demoralize their fellows begin by withdrawing them from religious influences, nor that the most effective means of raising the level of morality in anyone or in any society is to make a beginning by setting up Christian practices.

“This close connection between religion and morality is easily understood. A host of passions seethe in the heart, and even in the body of man. It is not enough for a man to know that he ought to control them, he must also have the power to do so. This power of self-control must reside in the will. But, who is not aware of the weakness of the human will when left to itself, how cowardly it is when face to face with the allurements of pleasure, and how its mainspring gets disordered or altogether broken down by bad habits, and sometimes even by a single sin? The will only acquires full strength to triumph over temptation by borrowing an increase of energy from the divine fountain of all moral power. But this heavenly fount, though ever flowing, only imparts its strength to those who draw from it, and it is by prayer and the sacraments, that is to say, by Christian practices, that a man is able to draw therefrom. There his will gets life and strength in two ways: first of all, by the

actual lessons and moral exhortations involved in every religious act; and then, by the infusion of that divine life which follows upon every impulse of prayer, and every participation in the sacraments. After such contact with God as is the result of every and any religious step a man no longer has to struggle on alone, God fills him with His heavenly power, and wins a victory in and through him."*

Such is the way to establish and preserve in oneself what is essential for a moral life. How much more is this the way to establish and preserve perfection within the soul. To reckon only on oneself to build up true devotion in one's soul is to condemn oneself inevitably to failure. Devotion is above all a supernatural work, and it requires the help of grace. This help is assured; indeed, God desires it even more than we do, but only on condition of our taking the necessary means for securing it. God desires to give us His grace in more and more abundance, but only provided that we draw it from the two ever-flowing springs, prayer and the sacraments.

Prayer is the very breath of the devout. To piety, it is what water is to the flowers, what wood is to a fire, what food is to the body. Cease to water the flowers, and they will soon wither away and die; put no wood

* Guibert: *Retraite Spirituelle*, pp. 345-347.

on the fire, and it will quickly go out; go for some time without food, and you will become faint, and feel your life ebbing away. And thus it is with prayer. Whoever gives up prayer cannot either acquire or keep true devotion.

"He who prays not," the Curé d'Ars used to say, "is like a fowl or a turkey which cannot fly up into the air. Even if they do fly a little, they soon come to the ground, and flounder and bury their heads in the earth, and appear to take pleasure in that alone. He who prays, on the contrary, is like the fearless eagle which soars in the air and seems always wanting to get nearer to the sun."

There are few, even amongst men, who cannot add some prayers to those which they say morning and evening. Those who are very busy will be content to add five minutes' silent reflection, morning or evening, to their usual petitions. Others are able to read, and to meditate on what they read. Those with still more time may bring themselves to hear Mass daily, or to say the rosary, or to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

"A truly pious soul, without in any way interfering with ordinary duties, but rather in order to fulfil them the better, loves long prayers,* solitary converse with God, the

* Newman writes thus as to certain prayers which may seem somewhat exaggerated: "Of all passions love is the most unmanageable; nay, more,

preaching of His word, relics, and holy pictures. Such an one will take a cordial and intimate part in the celebration of the Church's festivals and anniversaries. . . .

"So let people follow the filial bent of their piety, let them build themselves up spiritually and acquire homely habits by pious exercises, or even by means of certain supererogatory devotions. What harm can that do to the critics who complain of them? Are not such pious affections, such pleasures as are enjoyed through familiarity with holy things worth

I would not give much for that love which is never extravagant, which always observes the proprieties, and can move about in perfect good taste, under all emergencies. What mother, what husband or wife, what youth or maiden in love, but says a thousand foolish things, in the way of endearment, which the speaker would be sorry for strangers to hear; yet they are not on that account unwelcome to the parties to whom they are addressed. Sometimes by bad luck they are written down, sometimes they get into the newspapers; and what might be even graceful, when it was fresh from the heart, and interpreted by the voice and the countenance, presents but a melancholy exhibition when served up cold for the public eye. So it is with devotional feelings. Burning thoughts and words are open to criticism as they are beyond it. What is abstractedly extravagant, may in particular persons be becoming and beautiful, and only fall under blame when it is found in others who imitate them. When it is formalized into meditations or exercises, it is as repulsive as love-letters in a police report" (*Anglican Difficulties*, ii, p. 80. Longmans, 1910).

more than the dissipations of the world and its amusements, too often implicated in serious drawbacks ?”*

If we desire, as we ought, really to discharge our Christian duties in this life, and daily to go forward, we must know how to pray. We must also have constant recourse to the sacraments, for these truly contain grace, drawing it in a manner from the bosom of God Himself, and conveying it to us as channels bring water from the spring for our use.

But, it is by leading us to frequent the sacraments, and by arousing us to prayer and to the practice of pious exercises in general, that the various devotions are most profitable to our souls.

III.

Nevertheless, there is a considerable number of persons who make it their business to run them down. They speak of such practices as if they were beneath them. After seeing a few badly-trained Christians abuse them, making them a pretext for shirking their regular duties, wasting their time over them to no profit, or else giving an undue importance to a few secondary devotions, they claim, for their own part, a right to a

* De Ravignan: *La vie chrétienne dans le monde*, pp. 33, 34.

worship which shall rather be a worship in spirit and in truth.

In reality devotions, when properly used, are as noble as they are profitable. What are they but acts of piety? Through them we pay due homage to God, to our Lady, and to the Saints. And this is another advantage they confer upon us, an advantage which is enough to show their rightness.

Is it not, for instance, supremely worthy and right to pay especial worship to the sacred Humanity of Jesus, to His Sacred Heart, to His adorable Face? Is not His body the body of a God? Is it not the sacred body which suffered on our behalf?

Furthermore, how can it be unworthy of us to pay a special worship to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels, and the Saints? Is it not rather one of our most primary duties? If great men deserve our respect and homage, how much more have Mary, and the Angels and Saints, a right to the veneration of Christians?

And let no one say that this veneration ought to be confined to inward homage, or at any rate to refrain from making use of such external signs as pictures, medals, and the like. Is not man made of a body as well as a soul, and does not his bodily nature necessitate an exterior worship and justify such practices as depend upon it?

Certainly, if in our devotions we were to

stop short at some of the external emblems, that would be unworthy of our rational nature, but that would be abandoning devotion for superstition. When our missionaries strip savages of their amulets or fetishes, they teach them that such things have, of themselves, no power at all, that they are vain and false divinities which the devil uses to play upon their credulity. And when afterwards they give them crucifixes and medals, they do not fail to warn them that these things are not new fetishes, and that these, too, of themselves are no infallible safeguards, but that they point to something higher, and that by striking the attention of the beholder they are intended to stir his soul to a horror of sin, thankfulness for divine benefits, and the desire to pray.

When united with the more inward practices of devotion such outward signs help us to render to God and to His Saints the worship which is their due, and consequently they help us to obtain their protection.

Nor are they less calculated to advance us in the religious life. They strike our senses, and on account of their semi-corporal and semi-spiritual nature, they are a very profitable reminder to our souls. Look at the crucifix; it is a proclamation that Jesus rules over our household; but, further, every time our eyes fall upon it, does it not remind us of the love of our Saviour shown towards us

by His death on Calvary, and also of the love which He expects from us in return? Look at this medal: every time we regard it or kiss it, does it not make us think of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of our sacred obligations towards her, and of her intercessory power with her Son on our behalf? Hence the very signs have a value of their own.

IV.

Still it is clear that in the case of devotions, as in the case of all other things, abuses have to be avoided, especially such abuses as too often cause them to be despised and spoken against.

Devotions lead to abuse when they end in superstition, when medals, scapularies, or other emblems, are worn as amulets, when such and such an outward practice, quite apart from any efforts of the will and the dispositions of the soul, is said to secure without fail one's eternal salvation.

Further, they are abused when they lead to quite secondary practices taking the place of the fundamental acts of worship. When in church, who has not observed some persons go straight to a statue of St. Antony or St. Expeditus, and leave the building without thinking that the Master, really present in the Tabernacle, had the first claim upon their adoration?

Again, they lead to abuses when they take an undue place in one's whole life. If devotion can be adapted to every state of life, as was shown in Chapter I, all the more must devotions be adapted to one's regular duties. Sometimes people manage to shirk their proper work, take little interest in the education of their children, and leave undone the most pressing business, for the sake of some devotional exercise which they have bound themselves to perform. It is easy to see that such persons are wrong. If we must pray for an increase in virtue, we must never overlook virtue itself or leave duty undone, making an excuse of prayer.

But when devotions are well chosen and rightly ordered, they are most useful. Doubtless they are always an entirely different thing from devotion itself; still they are the ordinary sign of it, and its substantial and invaluable sustenance.

Would that we might make a right use of devotional practices throughout our lives. May we employ such as are within our range, to honour God, our Lady, and the Saints, to help us on the path of perfection, and to obtain heavenly graces. And then, while we are being blessed and guarded by God, our energies will constantly grow in strength, our virtues will increase, and our defects will gradually vanish away.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED TRINITY

MANY devotions are rightly very dear to the Catholic heart. Let us now study the chief of them in succession.

But above all secondary devotions, and even above those which may reasonably be termed primary, stands the worship^d due to God in the Oneness of His nature and in the Trinity of the divine Persons.

The worship we owe to God is of the very essence of religion. Let us therefore bear in mind its extent, that we may run no risk of appearing to turn any souls away from God when later on we have to treat of the secondary devotions and to remind any who might be inclined to forget it, that all our homage, at any rate implicitly, must be finally paid to God, and that it is He who, in the last resort, grants all the graces we receive by means of the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels, or the Saints.

God is above all things, as we know. All other beings, from Angels and men down to a grain of dust, are what they are by Him

only; they depend upon Him in every way; they cannot exist to live or move except through Him.

All our power over the things of this world comes of our dependence upon God, and is through Him. All our mastery over ourselves is due to Him. Being God's vassals and tenants for life in all respects and in all strictness, we not only owe Him a tax or tithe payable at set times, but day by day it is our duty to give Him, by means of the most humble and profound worship as well as by the most wholehearted obedience, all that we have and are.

The worship we owe to Him is the highest worship, that of adoration, *latria*, acknowledging His infinite perfection, His absolute dominion, and the entire dependence of every creature upon Him.

The worship we can and ought to pay to the Blessed Virgin, and to the Angels and Saints, is but an inferior worship, the worship of honour, *doulia*, or *hyperdoulia* in the case of our Blessed Lady. The Blessed Virgin, the Angels, and the Saints are the servants of God, and they are holy so far as they were true servants of His. Doubtless they possessed perfections and virtues; they truly have the power of doing us good; but while they made personal efforts of their own, yet it is really from God that they received all their good qualities and power; apart from

Him they would have had neither any strength nor even existence.

Although we make use of devotional practices in their regard, still when we honour them, we may not at all exclude the honour due to God, but quite the contrary; their greatness is only a derived greatness, and we must recognize that it is in reality God who does such mighty things in and through them. When we pray to them, we must confess that their power is received by them from the Almighty, and thus our worship and devotion will always ascend as they ought, at any rate implicitly, to God the Creator and Sovereign Lord of all things.

But revelation teaches us that in the divine Unity there are three Persons, equal in infinity and in eternity. Does not this distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost enable us to direct our devotion towards each one of the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity? May it not be said that our piety ought to have special sentiments towards the three divine Persons, according to the personal distinction and mission of each one of them?

No doubt, since the nature of God is one in the three Persons, and since they also have one power and one dominion, all three must be worshipped with one and the same adoration.

But, just as, owing to the Incarnation and Redemption, we think in a special way of the Son, and have devotions of a special character towards Him as the incarnate Word, so is it right that we should know how to contemplate and honour in a special manner the Father and the Holy Ghost.

Because the three divine Persons have only one mind and one will, and because they have all taken their share by one and the same omnipotence, which is common to them all, in everything they have made outside of themselves for the love of us, we can and we ought to address them all together in the unity of their nature. But, because they are distinct, it is also right that we should reflect upon and pray to each one in particular.

I.

Who then is the Father? To understand this fully, one would have to be His eternal Son, the Word, as infinite as Himself.

In Him we may contemplate His creative omnipotence, which is attributed to Him in an especial manner, although it is common to all three Persons. In the Creed, the Church calls Him "the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth," and in many of her prayers, she invokes His infinite power: *Oremus Deum Patrem omnipotentem*. Therefore, we may adore Him thus, and prostrate

ourselves before Him in a special way as being His creatures.

But, we know that His special characteristic is His Paternity. He is the Father, and He is this in all perfection; He is the Father of a Son as unique and infinite as Himself.

Is there any other name in all the world as sweet and venerable as the name of "father" or "mother"? But whatever beauty or affection or loveliness is contained in these two words is to be found in its highest and truest sense in the first Person of the Blessed Trinity. His eternal Son proceeds so really and essentially from Him that He is of one substance with the Father; and, owing to this high origin, He is perfectly like His Father, as holy and great and almighty as He is. The Father sees Himself in all His fulness in the Son, so that He who sees the Son sees the Father also. Moreover, amongst other reasons, it was to enable us to have some idea of this, and to draw our attention and our love unto Himself, that the Son became visibly incarnate.

To be both God and Father is one and the same thing to the first Person of the Blessed Trinity. God the Father can only be God as Father, with all the affections of fatherhood. The fecundity and infinite tenderness of paternity are as essential to Him as His very Being.

"And this Eternal Generation is not a

mystery done, but ever doing, like a pulse of the Divine Life which, as it ever began to beat, can never cease beating."* Every one of us can say: "At this very moment, O Father! as well as from all eternity, at this very moment Thou begettest Thy well-beloved Son, at this very moment Thou lovest Him. When I receive Jesus in Holy Communion, I receive Thee begetting Thy Son. Within my own heart takes place the adorable mystery of Thine infinitely fruitful generation, of Thine immense love. . . . But I need not even communicate for this participation to be established, O Father whom I adore. Thou dost enfold me in Thine ineffable holiness, Thou art my heart. And in my heart, Thou art the Father, and Thou engenderest Thy Son."† "Thou ever engenderest Thy Son. O high and potent doctrine! Whenever, amidst any of my poor and petty affairs, my thoughts suddenly revert to it, a religious dread thrills me to the marrow, for I feel as if I were on the threshold of the temple of eternity. And this very moment, which I am spending in frivolous waste, God is wholly occupied in the generation of His eternal Son."‡

But we know that in His love for us God the Father has willed to extend His Paternity

* Faber, *Bethlehem*, ch. ix.

† Sauv  , *Dieu intime*, 31, 32.

‡ De Regnon, *  tudes sur la Sainte Trinit  *, ii, 502.

really and personally to the sacred Humanity of Jesus, and by adoption to ourselves. And in adopting us as His children He has willed us to have an eternal share in His delight in, and tenderness towards, His eternal Son.

How lovely and comforting is this thought, and above all how full of practical consequences ! Only to think that there is in God an infinitely perfect Paternity, that He is all a Father to His Son, with all a father's love, as much of necessity and as perfectly as He is God, and that in a sense He has willed to extend that Paternity even unto ourselves !

Since no one is so truly a father as God the Father, ought not all that is rarest, all that is deepest, so far as veneration and filial respect and pure love and devotion are concerned, to enter into our feelings towards the first Person of the Blessed Trinity ? If we were no more than the creatures of God, it would be our duty to live only for our Creator : but we are His children. Far more, then, ought we to manifest our love and tenderness unceasingly towards Him. And, if our hearts are carried away at times with vain desires and unlawful affections, why should we not lift them up above all such things by setting our minds on God the Father, omnipresent, present even here within us, along with the Son and the Holy Ghost, entirely loving us with the purest and

the noblest and the mightiest affection, and requiring of us in return all the obedience and the love of sons ?

Let us imitate Jesus our pattern. Underlying all His mysteries, all His conditions, all His miracles, all His teachings, all His ordinances, underlying, too, all His sufferings and death, was His love of His Father. " He will introduce others to something of the same sort of intimacy with the Father which He Himself enjoys. This is part of His office. He has come to communicate the incommunicable Father. He teaches that the way to the Father is through Him. His Father's house is the many-mansioned home to which He has come to invite us. It is the Father who stands behind His parables, and is the king, and the husbandman, and the giver of the feast. He goes away, and it is to the Father He is going. He will prepare a place for those who love Him, but it is in His Father's house that the place shall be prepared. Faith in Himself is urged because it is acceptable to the Father. He will pray to His Father for those who love Him, and the Father will also grant us all we ask, if we ask it in the name of His Messenger. When it is good for those around Him, He asks the Father to glorify Him with some of the old glory which He enjoyed with Him before. When He comes out of the waters of Jordan to begin His ministry, He will have this grave

commencement authenticated by the testimony of the Father. When it is His will to reach the uttermost limit of His fearful sufferings, that last excess is to be the dereliction of His Father; and what does this not reveal?"*

"Our Lord does nothing but tell us of His Father. He is the Word, says Bossuet, He is nothing else, and His rôle, both in the bosom of God and upon earth, is to speak of His Father. But in His teaching and in His life there are passages where this constant preoccupation of soul is more plainly revealed, and these should be read with closer attention. Read over and over again from Chapter XIII to Chapter XVII of the fourth Gospel, meditate upon these chapters, and you will find nothing to compare with His devotion to the Father. Our Lord is about to die, and He opens His heart to His Apostles, and through them to the world; but what is the name which you hear at every moment breathed from the bottom of His soul rather than from His lips, with an ineffable veneration and tenderness? It is the name of His Father.

"When will this infinitely blessed name be continually heard upon our lips, or at any rate within our hearts? Then shall we be true brothers of Jesus, true children of God.

"O most holy Father, if Thou hast given

* Faber, *Bethlehem*, ch. ix.

us grace to be illumined and kindled with the love of Thy countenance, more reverend and more dear to us than the face of our earthly father, more dear to us than that of our earthly mother, more beloved than that of our heavenly Mother Mary, increase in us that light and love. Grant us to be filled with incomparable confidence in Thee, incomparable self-surrender to Thee !

“ Oh, that we might be enabled to cry out to all others who are capable of such devotion as this, a devotion that is unsurpassed—and the souls which are called to it are many—oh, that we might be enabled to cry out to them: How can you think of our Lord, and forget His Father and your own? Perchance you have scarcely ever given Him a definite place in your thoughts.

“ Hosts of times you have uttered His name, and yet you have never considered all the abysses of goodness, and life, and love, expressed in that name. You are able to understand, indeed, the possibility of loving the Blessed Virgin Mary with tenderness, and you have never thought that God, the Father of Jesus Christ and our own Father, ought to be loved with a more tender love. Yes, if there be a devotion that ought to be tender and deep, it is this !”*

Thus should our minds and hearts be constantly uplifted towards God the Father.

* *Sauvé, Dieu intime*, 66, 81.

II.

As to the Son, "He is the Word, not a word uttered outwardly, but non-existent before it was spoken. It is rather a word spoken inwardly, like and equal to, and consubstantial with, the Speaker, a word whereby, or rather wherein, He utters Himself in His fulness; a word which lives and subsists, without which He who speaks it does not live, although He does not live by it, but only speaks it; while the word itself, living by being spoken by Him, really lives by Him, and in Him, that is to say by means of a life absolutely identical with His. . . . It is a word which, in its oneness and simplicity, says all the mind of God, all that He has of heart and will, all that He has and is; a word which is absolutely equivalent to its Speaker; a word that eternally subsists; a word that is someone, a real, determinate, and distinct person; lastly, a true divine Person."*

We should be able thus to contemplate the Son in the bosom of the Father, eternal, boundless, almighty as the Father Himself, with Him the Creator of the world. We ought to adore Him in the Holy Scriptures, where He explicitly reveals Himself to us, and where He makes us understand out-

* Mgr. Gay, *I^{re} Elév.* 6.—*Confér. aux mères chrét.*, ii, 518.

wardly something of what He says in Himself.

But, the humanity to which He is united for the love of us is for us the great means of thinking about Him, and of adoring and loving Him, since that humanity possesses no other personality than His. He who is the Word in person, He was the little child whom the Shepherds and the Magi worshipped at Bethlehem. It is He, the eternal Son of God, who Himself in person led a life of hiddenness and silence at Nazareth. He who is the Designer and Creator of the world was Himself the poor working man who toiled along with St. Joseph. It is He who in His own person traversed the country parts of Judæa and Galilee; and it is He, the eternal Word, who spake in the speech of men to the Apostles and to the people: it is He who is the splendour and the perfect beauty of the Father, who was spat upon and scourged and put to death upon the cross. It is He, who is Life and Purity and Holiness, who dwells eucharistically in the tabernacle.

The Word manifested Himself unto us, gave Himself unto us, and abandoned Himself on our behalf by means of the Incarnation and the Redemption; and it is by paying especial attention to these two great mysteries that our minds and hearts may and must be raised unto Him.

And therefore no Christian can help remembering his Saviour, and we shall need several chapters to treat of devotion to the Word incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ.

III.

And, then, do we always think as we ought of the Holy Ghost ?

Let us examine ourselves on the point. Many of us have learnt to recite often the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. Do we continue to repeat it, and that with attention ? Whenever we make the sign of the Cross, or repeat the *Gloria Patri*, the adorable name of the Holy Ghost recurs upon our lips along with the names of the other two divine Persons. Do we ever consider this ? In His honour the Church often sings the beautiful *Veni Creator* when she celebrates one of the most solemn feasts of the year, that of Pentecost. Do we then really think of the Holy Ghost ?

“ There may perhaps be even to-day,” writes Leo XIII, “ some Christians who, if they were asked, would reply in the same way as those who answered the Apostles’ question as to whether they had received the Holy Ghost by saying: ‘ We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost.’ At any rate there are many who know not this Spirit: they frequently use

His name in their forms of prayer, but their faith is far from being truly enlightened."*

The Holy Ghost is the love of the Father and of the Son. "In man or Angel, however perfect love may be, it is never anything else than an appanage of a person already existing. But it is not so with God. In Him, the fatherhood is so perfect that it constitutes the first of the three Persons. And the sonship is so perfect that it constitutes the second Person. And, lastly, the love of the Father and of the Son is so perfect that it culminates in the third Person. And nothing is more living and individual than each one of these three Persons, and no man or Angel is really someone, or can say 'I' in the same way as each one of them can."†

The Holy Ghost is the infinite Love of the Father and the Son. But He is also infinite Love with regard to ourselves. While He acts in the Church, and, in order to increase and preserve her, imparts to her an eternal life and strength, He is, to each one of us, the principle of our supernatural life.

Of course, sanctifying grace and supernatural virtues are gifts of the three divine Persons who all three indwell and operate within us. But, by appropriation, these gifts are attributed to the Holy Ghost, because love is the principle of the gifts, the chief

* The Encyclical *Divinum illud munus*.

† Sauvé, *Dieu intime*, 148.

characteristic of which is love and charity, and because the Holy Ghost is, in God, the expression of love. It was the Holy Ghost whom our Lord promised to all who love Him: "If you love Me," He says, "keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever."* "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you."† "The charity of God," he writes again, "is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us."‡ "The Holy Ghost is the principle and author of our sanctification.

"It is He who sanctifieth us in all the sacraments.

"Regeneration and spiritual renovation begin for man in holy Baptism. In this sacrament the soul is stripped of the spirit of uncleanness, and the Holy Ghost enters into it for the first time, making it like Himself: 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'

"This same Spirit is given in Confirmation still more abundantly to ensure steadfastness and vigour in the Christian life: to Him are due the victories of the martyrs and virgins over the allurements of corruption. . . .

"He dwelleth in the souls of the just. The abundance of heavenly favours, which are

* St. John xiv. 15.

† 1 Cor. vi. 19.

‡ Rom. v. 5.

the result of His presence in pious souls, is revealed in many ways. . . . Among such gifts are to be found secret warnings, mysterious calls to the soul imparted by the Holy Ghost, without which one can neither make a beginning in the way of virtue, nor advance, nor reach the goal of eternal salvation."* Moreover, He helps us incessantly with actual graces.

To understand what He can work in us, and how important it is to pray to Him for the light and strength we need, it is enough to consider what the Apostles were before the coming of the Holy Ghost, and what they afterwards became on the day of Pentecost. Before the coming of the Holy Ghost, although the Apostles were educated in the school of Jesus Christ, they were still far from perfect; they were ignorant, ambitious, jealous, fearful, and timid: but no sooner had they received the Holy Ghost than they became new men, full of supernatural enlightenment and power. "No longer," says St. Chrysostom, "are they like gold just dug from the earth in rough and shapeless lumps of ore, but they are now as gold purified in the fire." But the fire, through which they have passed, is the Holy Ghost who, by the fire of His love, burns up all that is impure, all that is of the earth, in the elect. Hence it follows that if we would gradually attain

* The Encyclical *Divinum illud munus*.

to the perfection reached by the Apostles all at once by a great miracle, it is well for us to have a great devotion to the Holy Ghost. By Him we shall be able to begin, to continue, and to complete the work of our sanctification.

“ Say then to Him along with the Church: ‘ Glory be to the Holy Ghost as well as to the Father and the Son.’ Give Him as high a praise as to the other two Persons: *Procedenti ab utroque compar sit laudatio*. Tell out His holiness in equal measure with that of the Father and the Son: *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*. Implore His mercy and blessing: *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*.—When you join in the prayers of the Church, remember that she always prays to the Father, by the Son, in the unity of the Holy Ghost.—Love to repeat from time to time the beautiful *Veni Creator*.—Say to yourself, when making the sign of the cross, at the beginning of every prayer or piece of work or meal or action, that you are going to act in the name and under the influence of infinite Love; and reflect upon the obligation that lays upon you.—Consider, when you recite the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, that you are appealing to Love in person, and beg Him to come into your soul and into the Church, to renew the face of the earth and to give life to the hosts of spiritually dead, ardour to the lukewarm, and holiness to the fervent.—And

forget not to thank Him for all the blessings He has bestowed upon the world, and is bestowing upon it day by day, and even upon you; for every divine gift cometh from Him who is *the Gift par excellence*.—And imitate Him, for He is your pattern as well as the source of your life: imitate His love, His liberality and generosity, His joy and peace, His zeal. What a pattern He is of all these dispositions, since He is every one of them in a pre-eminently perfect manner, infinitely, and in His own Person.”*

The everlasting bliss of heaven will consist in beholding and loving the three divine Persons. Let us ever strive, while here below, to know them more and more, and to show forth in an ever more perfect way our feelings of love towards them.

The consolations and joys given by this devotion to some of the Saints we may get to understand by taking a page from the Life of St. Teresa. One day, on the feast of the Blessed Trinity, she was conversing with St. John of the Cross about this great mystery, to which they were both drawn by the same attraction. Teresa, kneeling on one side of the parlour grille, appeared to be rather lost in prayer than in conversation. John of the Cross, sitting on the other side of it, was speaking with a fire such as divine

* *Sauvé, Dieu intime*, 208.

love alone could impart to his usually gentle and quiet voice. In the midst of their discourse heaven opens above their heads, and their two souls united in the sublimest contemplation soar up to the supreme Good, a glimpse of which is granted to them. At this moment, the portress Beatrix of Jesus, having to deliver a message to the Mother Prioress, knocks at the parlour door. There is no answer. She knocks again, and finally opens the door. The two Saints, carried away by the power of their wonderful ecstasy, are both raised above the ground, just as they are; John of the Cross sitting in his chair, and gripping it with both hands in a vain effort to keep himself down, for he has carried it up along with him; and Teresa still kneeling, but caught up in the air. Seeing this, Sister Beatrix is beside herself, and calls any of the nuns she can find near the parlour, and thus some of the community become witnesses of the twofold prodigy.

This is what has been done, in the case of some Saints, by devotion to the Most Holy Trinity. What joy, and above all, what strength it might give us, were we, too, as wont to practise it as it behoves us.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

AFTER treating of what our devotion ought to be towards the Blessed Trinity, let us now consider the special devotion we should have towards the Word incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In general, we owe Him the same worship as we owe to the Father and to the Holy Ghost, since He is co-equal with Them: "That all men may honour the Son, as they honour the Father. He who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent Him."*

But we have also certain definite duties towards Him, by reason both of what He has done for us, and of what He is to us.

Every true Christian must have quite a special devotion to the adorable Person of Jesus Christ in His sacred Humanity, in which He has so greatly suffered for our redemption.

Now this devotion to the Person of Jesus Christ and to His sacred Humanity urges

* St. John v. 23.

him to think often of our Lord, to adore and praise Him, to give Him thanks and pray to Him, and to beg His forgiveness.

To enter into the spirit of this devotion he strives to know more and more of Jesus: "Now this is eternal life: That they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."* Thus he endeavours to get a real knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to that end he studies the life, the teaching, and the work of Jesus.

He imitates the Church, which adores, gives thanks, makes reparation, supplicates Jesus, and lives by worshipping Him, and by His mind, doctrine, and grace. Along with the Church, he loves to *contemplate and to celebrate his Saviour in the different mysteries of His life*: in His birth, His hidden life, His public life, His dolorous passion, His resurrection, His ascension, and His eucharistic life.

He frequently turns towards *Jesus Christ* as to his *God*; he considers the infinite glories of His divine nature, the ineffable perfections of His human nature; he is filled with joy and adoration at the thought of them.

Since he cannot but remember that Jesus is his *Redeemer*, he cannot sufficiently express his gratitude to Him.—He loves to see in Jesus Christ *the King of heaven*, our *Head*, our Master, our Sovereign Lord: and he promises Him the obedience which is His

* St. John xvii. 3.

due.—He honours Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, as the *Teacher* and *Pattern*, whose lessons he learns, and whose example he is to follow; as the *Supreme Mediator*, in whom his hope is set, as the *Pastor*, whose voice he is ready to hear.—And lastly, knowing that Jesus is the *best of Fathers*, he has a tender love full of confidence and respect, and he fears nothing so much as to displease Him.

This would all be true, even if Jesus were in heaven only: but we know that He is close to us in our churches, hidden in the sacred Host.

He is really there in the tabernacle, as really as He was at Bethlehem and Nazareth, going on with His life of self-abasement and humiliation.—He is there on the altar, immolating Himself otherwise than at Calvary, but not less truly.—He is there in Holy Communion as He was in the country of Judæa and of Galilee, ever showering benefits on all who come to Him.

What devotion and duties do we owe Him on account of His eucharistic presence? This is the question to which we are about to seek for a reply.

I.

Our first duty is to visit Him as frequently, as long at a time, and as devoutly as possible.

Unfortunately, many look upon visits to the Blessed Sacrament as a work of supererogation, all very well for ecclesiastics, or pious women with nothing to do. "Poor Jesus Christ," St. Alphonsus used to say with tears, "He is almost the only one who has no visitors; there He is, almost alone." In many a parish, the little lamp, ever alight before Him, is almost the only mark of gratitude the human heart appears to offer Him.

And yet, if one of our friends lives near us, is it not natural that we should often call upon him? Jesus Christ has taken up His quarters close to us in some neighbouring church. Is it not right, when we know that He has done this for our sakes, that we should often go into His presence to acknowledge the love and goodness He has shown towards us?

He is quite near us, and He tells us that it is His delight to be with us. His delight—let us note it well. As for His glory, it is in the harmony of the universe, in the splendours of creation, in the worship of Angels; but His delight is here in our midst, in the mysterious intercourse of the Church, in the *tête-à-tête*, the union of the Holy Eucharist.—And shall we leave Him all alone?—But were we to do this, it would show that we were heartless. If we only understand ever so little the love of God, that love is bound to call forth in our hearts the desire which the

humblest human love creates in those whom it binds together, the desire of visiting our Lord, of speaking to Him, of conversing with Him.

And the same desire should be kindled by the thought of the outrages He has to suffer in the sacrament of His love. "We are moved to pity by the affliction of those who are dear to us, and we go to visit them when they are weeping in loneliness to assuage their suffering by the compensation of our love and devotion. To them it is a great joy to know that misfortune has not led to their being left in the lurch. But if our hearts have such cravings so far as men are concerned, it is impossible for us to be insensible to the humiliations and sorrows of our God. It was to draw near to us that He made Himself as it were nothingness beneath the eucharistic species, and thus gave Himself up to the contempt of unbelievers, the blasphemies of the impious, and the profanations of the sacrilegious. How hardhearted should we be if we did not feel the need of pouring out our gratitude to Him for His humiliations, of telling Him that we appreciate their admirable dispensation, that He appears to us all the greater on account of His self-abasement, all the more glorious the more He is outraged, all the more lovable for not defending Himself from the insolence of those who profane Him, if we did not feel the need of summoning

all the creatures of heaven and earth to join in singing with us: "O Thou who art the most beautiful, the greatest, the best, the most perfect and holy of friends, let the homage of our deepest veneration and the assurance of our eternal love console Thee for all that offends Thee!"*

But whatever we may do, we shall always be sure to receive from Him far more than we have given. Nothing but our own self-interest would be a sufficient reason, even if there were none other, to encourage us often to visit our Lord in the Holy Sacrament.

In reality, who would be the loser if we were to leave Jesus Christ forgotten and all alone? Would He lose, or should we?—Yes, His heart would indeed suffer from our neglect, but nevertheless it would still be always infinitely perfect, infinitely happy, since it suffices to itself. It is we who would surely lose, and lose immensely. He who is waiting for us in our churches is a benefactor, an almighty benefactor. When it is a case of temporal interest, how ready are the worldly to become the petitioners of persons of influence; how eager they are to pay visits and to show respect for the sake of advantages of the most wretched description! And are we to be backward in going to seek the help of Him who is omnipotent? One has no need to be a Christian to reckon that the

* Monsabré, *Devoirs eucharistiques*, p. 173.

wants of the soul are a thousand times more important than those of the body; hence we should go to set them forth before the eyes of Jesus. Moreover, He is quite ready to hearken to our prayers, even with regard to temporal goods. Whether, then, we need temporal favours or spiritual assistance, let us not forget how much we may obtain by addressing ourselves to our Lord present in the tabernacle.

In such visits we may speak to Him just as we might have spoken to Him had we met Him in the country of Judæa or of Galilee: we may adore Him, beg Him to forgive our frailties, invoke Him with all ardour and confidence; but we must also hearken unto Him. There are troubled and anxious souls who are always talking to Him, and they never listen. And nevertheless, what good thoughts would they be inspired with, what enlightenment would they receive, if they were to bear in mind that we ought to hearken to the voice of God! Certainly, Jesus Christ will not always make His presence sensibly felt, and yet it is always a good thing for a soul to stay a few minutes in silence before Him after saying to Him in the words of Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

If we were to act thus, we should obtain much fruit from our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, while at the same time we should

fill the heart of the heavenly Prisoner of the Eucharist with joy.

If we are very busy, our visits will be shorter; they may last only a few minutes, but we shall have fulfilled a duty, and we shall have also done a good thing for ourselves. Many are the adults and youths of our large towns who have discovered this. If they cannot follow the example of their wives or their sisters, and enrol themselves in the noble army of the Perpetual Adoration, they are members of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament; and on their way home from work they go into church for a while. When they have more leisure, as for instance during their holidays, they are by no means ashamed, but rather consider it as an obligation, to make longer visits to our Lord to console Him in His loneliness, and to beg Him for the graces which they need. May such pious customs continue and increase!

II.

But a devotion to Jesus in the Sacrament still more pleasing and not less fruitful, nay, more fruitful even than visits to the tabernacle, is assistance at Holy Mass.

We know that Holy Mass is the most august of all the acts that are done on earth, the act that procures the highest honour to God; and to the Church militant, and even

to the Church suffering, the greatest amount of blessing and forgiveness. This adorable Sacrifice of the altar, being *par excellence* the praise of God and the treasure of mankind, how eager should Christians be to assist at it ! Knowing what the Mass is, how can they fail to yearn to hear it, not only on Sundays, when they are bound to do so under pain of mortal sin, but every day of the week !

They who really understand its greatness are grieved when they are deprived of it by work or business or sickness keeping them away from church. If their calling allows them any time to spare, they love to attend Mass daily, even if they have to rise betimes to do so, that they may not miss its blessings. They do for God and their own souls what so many do for the devil, the world, and their own pleasure. They do not shrink from curtailing their morning repose, just as many do not hesitate to sacrifice their night's rest to the hours of amusement, and they are present at the Holy Sacrifice as often as possible before their day's work begins.

Ah ! if we had only spent our Good Friday evening at Calvary, if we had only seen against the fearfully black sky the livid and bleeding body of Jesus in sharp outline, knowing whom He was, how deeply should we have been stirred ! But to-day, at Mass there is the same God, as we well know, before us. Do we really consider this ?

“ Oh ! ” exclaims Bossuet, “ how hard-hearted Christians are ! . . . Come, for every day is a Good Friday, every day Calvary is set up on our altars. O redeemed souls, gather ye to celebrate the mercies of your Father who is in heaven, through Jesus Christ who is immolated on your behalf. Where the body of Jesus is, there is your meeting-place ; for where the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”*

And what are we to do ? We must offer the Victim along with the priest. “ Believe surely,” says St. Alphonsus, “ that the Holy Sacrifice is offered not only by the priest, but by all who are present. All fulfil in some measure the office of a priest.” And this is what the Church reminds us of expressly, when she puts these words in the mouth of the celebrant at the *Orate fratres* : “ Pray, brethren, that my Sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.” And likewise, after the *Sanctus* : “ Bear in mind, O Lord, all Thy servants and hand-maidens, and all who are here now, for whom we offer unto Thee, and who offer unto Thee on their own behalf, this Sacrifice of praise, for themselves and for all belonging to them.”

Let us, then, join with the priest we see before us, and let us also join with the Priest unseen, with Jesus Christ Himself, the chief Offerer, as well as the Victim, of the sacrifice.

* *Méditations sur l'Evangile, 47^e journée.*

“What did Jesus do? He took bread, and blessed it, and gave thanks, and prayed. . . . And the priest does the same. . . .

“Let us pay close attention. Let us follow the priest, who is acting in our name and speaking for us; let us remember the old custom of each one offering his own bread and wine, supplying the matter of this heavenly sacrifice. The ceremony has changed, but its spirit remains the same. We all of us offer along with the priest; we give our consent to all that he does, and to all that he says.

“And what does he say?

“‘Pray, brethren, that my Sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.’

“And what do you reply?

“‘May the Lord receive It at thy hands!’

“What?

“‘My Sacrifice, and yours.’

“And what does the priest say besides?

“‘Bear in mind Thy servants, for whom we offer unto Thee.’

“But is this all?

“No; he adds: ‘Or who offer unto Thee this Sacrifice.’

“Let us then offer along with the priest; let us offer Jesus Christ, let us offer ourselves along with the whole Catholic Church, spread throughout the world.

“The priest blesses, he gives thanks over

the bread and the wine which are about to be changed into the Body and Blood, and he prays for the whole Church: bless ye too, and give thanks, and pray. Then comes the special benediction, whereby the Body and the Blood are consecrated; hear, believe, and give your consent. Offer along with the priest, and say *Amen* to his invocation and prayer. . . .

“Be present not only in body but in spirit at the Holy Sacrifice. Is Jesus Himself here only in a corporal manner? Is not His spirit also with us?”

“What, then, does the priest mean when he says: *Dominus vobiscum*, *The Lord be with you?*—*And with thy spirit*, you reply.

“Thus, then, you are meant to unite with the spirit of the priest, and with the spirit of the Sacrifice. Consider that the species are a covering that envelops the Body of your Lord, and that they are as it were His shroud. You are standing by the side of the grave wherein there lies your Father, done to death with the wounds which He has incurred for your salvation. Be not insensible, but bewail your sins as it is meet.”*

How is it that there are Christians to be found who do not understand such truths as these? Why do they come to Mass as if it were a mere spectacle, in which the lights, the chants, and the vestments stand in place

* Bossuet, *Méditations sur l'Évangile*.

of God, whose presence and most holy operations they appear to be quite unaware of?

Let us, on the contrary, go often to church, and let us follow with devout attention every phase of the Sacrifice which recalls and renews the Passion of our Lord.*

Thus shall we render unto God the homage that is His due. Holy Mass will then be to us a fountain of regeneration and of spiritual vigour, and it will draw down upon all those whom we love, whether living or dead, an abundance of heavenly blessings.

III.

And this will be especially the case if, while assisting at the Holy Sacrifice, we draw near to the Holy Table.

It is to this, to frequent Holy Communion, that true and perfect devotion to Jesus in the Host should lead.

Of course, we are far from worthy to communicate. And even the greatest Saints and the Holy Apostles themselves were not

* There are many good ways of hearing Mass. When we assist at it, we may meditate upon our Lord's Passion; we may reflect upon the ends of the Sacrifice; we may adore, give thanks, and make mental prayer to God; we may repeat vocal prayers; but pre-eminently the best method is to use a Missal, and to follow the various prayers of the priest and the ceremonies which he performs, joining with him in heart and mind.

worthy of it, and the Church wishes us to be filled with the sense of our unworthiness, since she makes us say before our Communion: *Domine non sum dignus*. God is infinite, and as for ourselves we are but the poorest of creatures.

But we are also the children of God. Provided that we are cleansed from all grave sin, and really trying to do better, we may draw near without fear. We show our Lord more respect and honour when we fling ourselves into His arms with confidence and love than when we shrink away from Him on account of his greatness and our own littleness.

The much-lamented Pontiff, Pius X, has only lately reminded us of this: Our Lord did not institute the Eucharist as a reward and privilege, but as a food and remedy. We do not eat because we are strong, but to keep up our strength. We do not take medicine because we are well, but to recover health. And, in the same way, God urges us to communicate, not because we are holy, but that we may become so, not because we are free from spiritual infirmities, but that we may be cured of them. Communion is not a reward deserved by the fervent; it is a means offered to all for the acquisition of fervour.

In former times, when the martyr was on his way to the place of his last and glorious sufferings, the bishop, in order to strengthen and encourage him, gave him the Body of

the Lord. In like manner, in having to face the daily assaults of the flesh, the world, and the devil, and amidst our constant and troublesome temptations, we go to the Holy Table to provide ourselves beforehand with armour and with arms: there we rekindle in ourselves the often-dying fires of divine love which supersede, or at any rate subdue, the deadly flames of passion.

What if, despite all our efforts, we relapse into mortal sin? Provided that we have obtained forgiveness of it by sincere contrition and absolution, let us not fear to communicate often; for "Communion," says the Council of Trent, "preserves men from mortal sins."

Are we weak, imperfect, and languid? Let us resort to Him who is power, perfection, and life. In the Gospel, do we not read of the master telling his servants to bring into the feast "the poor and the sick, the blind and the lame?" Then let us apply this description to ourselves.

Are we fired with the noble ambition of advancing daily towards perfection? It is a work we cannot succeed in of our own strength. What, then, do we need? Spiritual reading, indeed, and prayer and endeavour, but, above all, food is what we must have, divine food, the Eucharist.

And let us not judge our communions solely according to their sensible results.

The efficacy of the divine operations is often what cannot be ascertained; the mystery of the Eucharist itself is an example and a proof of that. No outward and perceptible change is seen in the sacred species of bread and wine, and yet we are firmly and invincibly persuaded that the whole of the substance of the bread and of the wine has been changed, and that it no longer subsists, but that in its place, by a wonderful conversion, there are now the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ. And in the same way, though in our communions we have not always the upliftings of sensible fervour, and although there may not appear in us any outward alteration as an effect of the sacrament, still we are really renewed in our spiritual life, since, along with the Eucharist, we have received the true Life. In eternity we shall discover from what evils and misfortunes we have been kept by our communions, and the spiritual goods they have enabled us to enjoy.

We know well, indeed, that these results are all the more splendid in proportion to the pains we have taken to prepare for them. At the Holy Table we obtain true nourishment for our life, if we only have a will to live and to believe in that life which flows from our Lord.

The writer of the *Imitation* says sorrowfully when he speaks of the world: *Quoties*

inter homines fui, minor homo redii, "I have never been amongst men without feeling I had lessened myself as a man."

If we have to live in the world, and desire not to run upon such a reef as this, let us draw near to Jesus in the Host as we should do. Let us come to His feet to adore Him really present in the Holy Tabernacle; let us assist at the great Sacrifice of the altar; and let us communicate as often as possible. God is there; He is waiting to raise us up to Himself that He may impart His own life to us. When the last hour shall strike, we shall rejoice greatly at having answered to His call. To us He will not be as one who was unknown and forsaken by us; for here we shall have adored and received Him; He will have sanctified us when He was hidden and humiliated; and in heaven He will give us Himself in all His unveiled glory.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

ALL Catholics are bound to acknowledge their duties towards the Eucharist, and none will be found to deny that since Jesus offers Himself for us, wills to be the food of our souls, and really dwells in our midst in our churches, it is right to visit Him, to receive Him in Holy Communion, and to assist at the Holy Sacrifice.

But when mention is made of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, one hardly finds the same unanimity, especially amongst men. Even to-day one may find plenty of Christians who, in spite of the exhortations of the Holy Father, do not understand this devotion, and who look upon it as novel, useless, or even as more or less unworthy of them.

Let us then see what the mind of the Church is, and what therefore ought to be our own mind on the subject; and to this end let us look at the development of this devotion, at the objections that have been brought against it, and at its nature and advantages.

I.

The Word was made flesh because He loved us. The mission of Jesus is a mission of love. In the Gospel, which is the story of His work and His sufferings, His tender compassion is felt from one end to the other. Moreover, Christian tradition is full of the praises of this charity towards us, and of exhortations to us to render love for love. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church, following in the footsteps of the Apostles, especially in those of St. John the Apostle of love, rival one another in their enthusiasm on the subject: *Sic nos amantem, quis non redamaret*, "One who loves us so, who can help loving in return?" Such is their constant refrain.

And this is already, in some measure, devotion to the Sacred Heart; it is one of its elements, the spiritual element, since, as we shall soon see, this devotion is fundamentally devotion to our Lord's love for us. Nevertheless, the latter is not altogether commensurate with the former, because it does not clearly exhibit a definite worship of the Heart of flesh of Jesus, taken as the symbol of His love.

In early days, the pierced side of our Saviour, from which flowed water and blood, was considered as a fountain of grace; it was regarded as a place of refuge and repose,

where one could unite with Jesus. Christians had come quite close to the Sacred Heart, but it was not yet distinctly perceived in the wounded side as a subject for special honour.

But from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the proper cultus of the Sacred Heart begins to take shape definitely.

"The iron drove through the side of Jesus," says St. Bernard. "It reached His heart. The secret of that heart is disclosed through the piercing of the body. Thereby we discover that great sacrament of goodness, the merciful love of our God."*

"Since we have reached the most sweet Heart of Jesus," writes St. Bonaventure† in the thirteenth century, "and it is good to abide there, let us not readily go away from it. . . . Therefore, O Jesus, we will draw near to Thee, and rejoice in Thee, when we think of Thy Heart. What a good treasure, what a pearl of great price, is Thy Heart, O dear Jesus! Who would not wish to possess this pearl? Of a truth I would rather give up all the rest, I would give up for it all my thoughts and all the affections of my soul, flinging myself wholly into the Heart of my dear Jesus. . . . Who can help loving this wounded Heart? Who can help loving it in return, when it loves so much? . . . Since

* *In Cant. sermo*, xli, No. 4.

† *Opera omnia*, 1898, t. VIII, p. 53 ff.

I have now found Thy Heart, O Jesus, I will pray to Thee as my God. Hearken to my prayers in the sanctuary in which Thou grantest favourable answers: or rather, draw me entirely into Thy Heart."

About the same period, in the works of St. Mechtild († 1298) and St. Gertrude († 1302), we see the devotion living, and as it were in action, in a host of exercises, and in the very intimate intercourse of these two Saints with Jesus.

Gertrude, as her Benedictine* editor well remarks, "seems to be appointed as a prophetess of love for these latter days. And this divine love is personified, so far as she is concerned, in the Sacred Heart. It was her mission to reveal the rôle and action of the divine Heart in the dispensation of God's glory and of the sanctification of souls."—The same thing may be said of St. Mechtild, in her own degree.

In the train of St. Gertrude and St. Mechtild, as history tells us, follow as rivals in devotion St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Teresa, to mention only the most celebrated.

St. Francis of Sales, in the early part of the seventeenth century, asks his daughters of the Visitation "to be the servants, the adorers, the imitators, of the Sacred Heart.

* *Révélation de sainte Gertrude*, Paris, 1878, preface, p. xv.

This Heart," he tells them, "will be their home, and the root of the tree of which they are to be the branches." "The religious of the Visitation," he says again, "who are happy enough to keep their rule, may be called daughters of the Gospel, specially founded in this age to be imitators of the two dearest virtues of the Sacred Heart of the Word incarnate, the virtues of gentleness and humility, which are the basis and foundation of their order, and give them the privilege and the incomparable grace of bearing the name of the *Daughters of the Sacred Heart*."*

In 1641 and 1643 Father Eudes consecrates the two congregations of which he is the founder to the Heart of Jesus as well as to the Heart of Mary, and gives it to them as their coat of arms. He also prescribes for them special exercises in honour of the Most Sacred Heart, for which he composes and orders a special office to be celebrated. Then he starts a kind of third order, consisting of confraternities of the Sacred Heart, which contribute towards the propagation of the devotion to it.

But so far the complete development had not taken place.

The Apostle St. John revealed to St. Gertrude the fact that God was holding back the full manifestation of His Heart, so as some

* Hamon, *Vie de la B. Marguerite-Marie*, p. 135.

day to rekindle a charity which had grown cold. That time, set apart by divine Providence, came towards the end of the seventeenth century. Jansenism was then passing over the souls of men with the parching wind of its desolating doctrines. Without denying the love of Jesus, it tied our Saviour's arms to the Cross. The Father had to make room for the Master, and, on the plea of respect, fear now took the place of filial confidence.

But, on December 27, 1673, a humble religious of the Visitation, Blessed Margaret Mary, was in adoration before the Tabernacle, when all of a sudden a heavenly light shone from the altar, and through the grille she saw the adorable Person of our Lord. Our Saviour's breast appeared to her to send forth a glowing brightness; and in this fire she saw His Heart radiant as a dazzling sun, and heard a voice saying to her: Behold this Heart which has so loved men ! On seventy-two occasions she had similar visions, in which our Lord revealed to her in increasing degrees the treasures, the sorrows, and the designs of His Heart, charging her with the mission of manifesting them to the world. At the same time He pointed her to a Jesuit, Father de la Colombière, to be her support amidst all the trials and impediments which were to put difficulties in the way of her apostolate.

Unhappily the world was slow to respond to the call of divine mercy, and France, who was specially asked for a national consecration to the Heart of Jesus, a national church dedicated to the Sacred Heart, and a flag bearing a representation of it, remained officially deaf to the heavenly commands. It was only amidst all the horrors of the Revolution that Louis XVI, on the eve of ascending the steps of the scaffold, drew up a scheme of consecrating his kingdom to the Sacred Heart. Only once, in 1870, when France lay on her death-bed in the grip of the foreign invader, did she see the flag of the Sacred Heart flying on the battle-field; and it is only at about the same period that the National Assembly declared that it would be to the advantage of the public to build a church to the Sacred Heart at Montmartre.

Nevertheless, even in the lifetime of Blessed Margaret Mary the worship of the Sacred Heart had left the precincts of monasteries and seminaries, and had found amongst the people affecting compensations for official indifference.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it advanced by leaps and bounds. Numbers of associations and families of religious were founded under the ægis of the Sacred Heart; in all the churches altars were erected in its honour; the feast of the Sacred Heart was

made a feast of the universal Church, and was celebrated everywhere with the greatest solemnity; and the devotion to the Sacred Heart became truly popular.

Thus, our Lord's intervention — which without temerity we cannot refuse to recognize—in the revelations of Paray-le-Monial and the personal action of Blessed Margaret Mary, gave a decisive impulse to the abiding assiduity of the faithful, and commenced an unprecedented era for the worship of the Sacred Heart, and led to its being understood and observed not only more clearly and steadily, but also more broadly.

Yet it must not be forgotten that there were a real but gradual expansion and propagation of this cultus long before the work of Blessed Margaret Mary.

Nor must the fact be overlooked that, even if there had been no revelations, or even if they proved to be illusory or questionable, the worship of the Sacred Heart would still be firmly established and quite legitimate. It has an intrinsic value of its own; it is quite justifiable and to be recommended for its own sake. The Church first of all pronounced judgment on it, and gave her approval to it, in itself, and that quite apart from the supernatural communications afterwards made in its favour. So true is this, that more than half a century elapsed

between the decree of 1795 authorizing the feast of the Sacred Heart, and the inquiry into the revelations received by Margaret Mary, the first act of the apostolic proceedings begun for the beatification of the servant of God.

II.

This worship is addressed to the Heart of flesh of the Man-God, but it does not stop there. Everything in the sacred Humanity of Jesus is adorable. The Church never makes any separation, never cuts off any single part from the rest of that divine whole, so as to make it in itself the object of any special worship.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is addressed to the person of Jesus Himself. And, though it goes in a more special way to the Heart, it goes to it as a symbol of the love of Jesus, as a special sign of what our divine Lord was and did and suffered for us. It is His loving Heart that we honour according to the saying of our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary: Behold this Heart which has so loved men as to keep nothing back, spending itself and being spent on their behalf.

The object of the devotion to the Sacred Heart is neither Love in itself nor the Heart in itself; it is, in the words of Blessed Margaret Mary, "the love of Jesus under the

figure of His Heart of flesh," it is His Heart of flesh, but that Heart as an emblem of love, and as united to the person of Jesus Christ.

And this is the doctrine which was quite clearly taught as soon as the cultus received official recognition. "Many there are who fail to discriminate," writes the Promoter of the Faith in his *Reply to Objections*. "They regard the object of the feast, the Heart of Jesus, in an entirely material manner . . . as if it were the relic of some Saint's body, religiously preserved in a reliquary. This is a serious mistake. This is not at all the way in which the feast of the Sacred Heart is to be understood. How then is it to be taken? We will briefly explain.

"The Heart of Jesus must be considered:

"1. As being only one (on account of its close union) with His divine soul and person:

"2. As the symbol, or natural seat, of all the virtues and inner feelings of Jesus Christ, and particularly of the immense love He has for His Father and for men:

"3. As the centre of all the interior pains suffered by our most loving Redeemer all His life long, but especially during His passion, for the love of us:

"4. Not to forget the wound He received on the cross, a wound caused not so much by the soldier's lance as by the love that opened it.

“ And all this belongs to the Heart of Jesus, all this is united with that Heart to constitute the object of this feast; and hence it follows, and the point is worthy of all consideration, that the object of the feast, thus conceived, really and truly is all the innermost soul of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Therefore when the Catholic adores the Sacred Heart, he considers it as it really is — that is to say, as united to the soul and person of Jesus Christ, as filled with life and feeling and knowledge. He considers it as a living heart, full of the very life of the person of Jesus, and necessarily participating in the divinity of the Word whereby it subsists, being only one with Jesus Christ. He says of this Heart, and does not shrink from saying, that it prays and offers itself to the Father, that it has sacrificed itself on our behalf and for our salvation, that it has suffered, that still, alas ! it is too often outraged; because he knows that a living heart shares in the vitality and the personality of him to whom it belongs. Hence he unites with the Heart of Jesus in prayer and sacrifice; he honours that Heart, prays to it, invokes it, gives thanks to it, begs its forgiveness, and adores it, because he knows that his prayers, thanksgivings, and acts of reparation and adoration, when addressed to the Heart of Jesus, go through it directly to the person of the divine Redeemer.

After hearing this explanation, one must either disregard or disown all the needs of man's nature, if one would suppress or find fault with the devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Let no one say, as the Jansenists did, that this worship is materialistic, and that true religion is that which is "in spirit and in truth."

Those who fancy that sensible things are unnecessary, or at any rate unprofitable, for ascending to God by knowledge and love, forget their own humanity. As Pascal said, we are "neither angels nor brutes," we are made of body and soul, and, even in our relations with our Creator, we keep the conditions of our human nature. The picture and the word give material shape to the idea: in the look of a friend we discover the outward expression of his invisible affection, which again appears in the tokens that he leaves with us after he has gone away. In the same way, in the sphere of religion we may rightly have recourse to sensible symbols, and when the worship of the Sacred Heart offers to our adoration certain physical and corporal elements, it has the advantage of being in harmony with the fundamental tendencies and wants of human nature.

It is, of course, objected that modern physiology and philosophy have exploded the old idea of the heart being the seat of

love. "It is from the head," we are told, "which is the centre of the nervous system, that thoughts and feelings proceed. You have no right to honour our Lord's love in paying honour to His Heart."

There is no doubt that scientific experiments lead one to suppose that the brain is the source of our affective feelings. But the physiological problem has nothing to do with the devotion we are treating of. The worship of the Sacred Heart does not rest upon any physiological considerations; it merely presupposes the universally admitted fact that the heart is the symbol and emblem of love. It is certain that men have generally associated together the heart and love, and used one as the sign of the other. If there were no foundation for this association, even then general use would be enough of itself to give the heart an undeniable symbolic value, for symbolism is a form of speech, and in language use is supreme. Moreover, as a matter of fact, we observe, and science confirms the observation, that if the heart is not accurately to be spoken of as the seat of love, at any rate every feeling of any strength makes a powerful impression on it. For instance, the feeling of love seizes upon it, holds it gripped, and intensifies its beatings, or stops them altogether. Thus, there is at least a correlation between the functions of our affective nature and those of the heart.

Hence, it is not without good reason that the corporal Heart of Jesus is honoured as the symbol of His love.

III.

As to the effects of grace resulting from such worship, they are abundant and marvellous.

The chief and the most direct result is to remind us of the extent to which we have been loved by Jesus, and thus to lead us to acknowledge His love by loving Him in return, cleaving to Him with all our hearts, zealously, confidently, generously.

The characteristic act of the devotion to the Sacred Heart is an act of love, variously manifested, by the tenderest affection, by gratitude, by praise, by a desire to please, by services of practical zeal, by compassion, by compensation through reparation. An act of a love that is not only affective but effectual, coming out in the things we do and in the keeping of the law, according to the teaching of the Master: "He that keepeth My commandments, he it is that loveth Me." And one application of it is the cultivation of Christian virtues and dispositions. The love of one's neighbour flows from it, for we must love those who are dear to Jesus Christ.

What devotion could possibly inspire in us

a greater horror of sin or sorrow for having committed it or confidence in getting it forgiven, or a firmer resolution to avoid it? It is impossible for any one to think of this Heart, depicted to us as surmounted with a cross and surrounded with thorns, without reflecting that it was our own sins that filled it with bitter grief. Furthermore, when we think of the infinite loving-kindness of this Heart, the hope of forgiveness naturally springs up in our souls, as well as a desire to sin no more and a sincere will to love God. He who truly practises this devotion will not make it his first care to find material pleasures, as is so often done in this age of sensualism, for he remembers what sufferings the Heart of Jesus endured, and he enters resolutely upon the path of duty in a generous spirit, without shrinking from any sacrifice.

This primary fruit of true devotion to the Sacred Heart is the characteristic of a solid and manly devotion, not at all, as has often been said, without any evidence in support of the saying, of a capricious, feeble, and superficial piety.

Then there are the well-known promises made by our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary in favour of those who are devout to the Sacred Heart. The following is a brief list of them:

“I will give them,” says our Lord, “all the graces required for their state of life.”

"I will cause their families to be at peace."

"I will comfort them in their troubles."

"I will be their sure refuge in life, and above all in death."

"I will abundantly bless all their undertakings."

"In My Heart sinners will find a fountain, and an infinite ocean of mercy."

"The lukewarm shall become fervent."

"The fervent shall rise to great perfection."

"I will bless every place where the representation of the Sacred Heart is exhibited and honoured."

"I will endue priests with the gift of touching the most hardened hearts."

"Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, and they shall never be effaced from it."

"The omnipotent love of My Heart will grant to all who communicate on the first Friday of nine months in succession the grace of final perseverance."

The last of these promises—which is moreover the most important of them—has given rise to some controversy. It was little spoken of in the first treatises on the Sacred Heart, but it really forms part of the writings recognized by the Congregation of Rites during the preliminaries for the beatification of Margaret Mary. This is the authentic text: "I promise thee in the exceeding mercy of

My Heart, that its omnipotent love shall grant to all who communicate on the nine first Fridays of consecutive months the grace of final penitence, and that they shall not die out of favour with it, nor without receiving the last sacraments, being assured of a safe refuge in their last hour."

Does this mean that by reason of this promise, if one has made nine consecutive communions on the first Friday of the month, and nine good communions, for here clearly good communions are meant, one may neglect the other means of sanctification, and not be on one's guard carefully to avoid what may lead to damnation? Certainly not. Thus to act would be to tempt God, and to run the risk of forfeiting one's rights to the benefits of the "great promise." Here there is no encouragement to do ill. Jesus does not say that He will save those who presumptuously continue in sin, but that He will grant a powerful grace against sinning: He will give, at any rate to all who have no evil will, an omnipotent grace to help them to get free from sin at last.

IV.

In conclusion, let us say a few words about the chief practices of the devotion to the Sacred Heart.

As to interior acts, these are well summed

up in two pages by one of the earliest authors who have dealt with the subject, Father de Gallifet.* “The interior worship of the Heart of Jesus,” he writes, “consists in the mind entering into the excellence of the divine Heart, that is to say, in understanding its worth, its sanctity, its sublimity, the treasures of grace hidden in it, all that it endured for the glory of God and for the salvation of men, how pleasing it is to the Most Holy Trinity, how attractive it is to the faithful, and, in short, how this Heart deserves our love and supreme respect. These considerations should give rise to an infinite esteem for the Sacred Heart. That is the first foundation of the whole of this worship.

“The first care of those who are zealous for the Heart of Jesus will be to acquire this knowledge, and to be diligent in meditating upon it, and in sounding its depths. For this purpose they must not be satisfied with mere reading, they must meditate, and still more must they pray and practise the devotion.

“After thus rightly disposing their minds, they will have no difficulty in producing acts of will, by which we mean affections corresponding with the infinite excellence of the Heart of Jesus. Supreme adoration is due to its supreme worthiness, to its sovereign

* *De usu et praxi cultus S. Cordis Jesu* iii. c. 1.

prerogatives and perfections, and also admiration, glorification, and praise. Its immense love deserves love in return; the benefits it sends forth upon us, a proper thanksgiving. Its mercy demands our confidence, the virtues, of which it is the seat, our imitation, the insults that wrong its honour, reparation. And so one might continue.

“And, since nothing is dearer to the heavenly Father than this divine Heart, let us make use of this Heart in approaching Him to render all that we do acceptable and agreeable to His infinite Majesty, uniting all our actions and all our sufferings to the actions and sufferings of this Most Sacred Heart. By the Heart of Jesus we adore God, we praise and love Him, we beg for benefits, we give thanks, we humble ourselves under the divine will, we ask for the forgiveness of our sins, and so forth. Lastly, and this practice is as it were characteristic of this devotion, we put side by side the immense love with which the Heart of Jesus burns for men and the outrages inflicted upon it by their ingratitude, and, looking upon ourselves as amongst the ungrateful, covered with confusion and penetrated with grief, we pray to it with the most humble instancecy to forgive us; and prostrate before it we offer it from the bottom of our hearts and with all our power the just expiation it demands. This kind of inward homage

realizes the most ardent desires of the Heart of Jesus."

As for the exterior acts of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, the chief are as follows: the celebration of the first Friday of the month, particularly by the *amende honorable* and a reparatory communion; the weekly special observance of the Friday by communion and the exercise of the "Holy Hour," an hour passed in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament the night before; and, lastly, by the veneration of the representation of the Sacred Heart and by giving it a place of honour in one's house.

Further, all the Christian practices that promote the growth of the love of Jesus in the soul, especially such as cause a worship of love and reparation to be paid to the Most Holy Sacrament, enter into the spirit of the devotion to the Sacred Heart.*

An impulse of grace urges Catholics more and more in the direction of the devotion to

* In His intimate disclosures to Blessed Margaret Mary, Jesus insisted upon His love to men as shown in the Holy Eucharist. He complained of not being loved in the sacrament of His love by His own children, and He asked for a generous reparatory worship to compensate Him for all the outrages He receives on the altar. Thus, the devotion to the Sacred Heart is so far from doing any injury to the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament that it only makes it stronger and more tenderly loving.

the Sacred Heart. The Catholic nations have put themselves more and more under the protection of this adorable Heart.

The whole race of mankind was consecrated to it by the late zealous Pontiff, Pius X. Let us then cling with all our hearts to this devotion.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be praised and adored for ever and ever !

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVOTION TO THE CROSS

ON every side we see the Cross. It has the place of honour in our churches. In every truly Christian family it is held to be a duty to give it a place of honour in the house. Many wear it as a matter of custom; but often, just because it is a matter of habit, it does not receive the respect that is its due, or at any rate the sight of it does not impart the spiritual benefits which should be derived from it.

Therefore our time will not be wasted in considering the devotion we should pay to it, and the chief lessons to be learned from it.

I.

The Cross was chosen by the Lamb of God to be the altar on which He offered His last sacrifice as a victim. It became really the blessed instrument of our redemption. It was the weapon with which Jesus Christ overcame the devil, and with which we, too, in our Saviour have conquered the powers of evil and recovered our right to heaven.

How, then, can we help giving true homage, in the first place, to the relics of the true Cross? How can we help venerating this holy Cross, watered and drenched with the blood of our God, whereby, too, we have been really saved? What confidence should we not have in its power? How religiously should we not treat the smallest fragments of it?

We know that God often uses portions of the clothing and relics of the Saints to work miracles. What may we not expect from the relics of the true Cross?

It is, indeed, very natural that we should desire to possess some of them, and that, when they are exposed in our churches, we should pay the Cross a special worship, that we should prostrate ourselves before it, and kiss it with veneration and confidence.

But it is only right that we should surround the simplest representations of the Cross with honour and respect, whether they be plain crosses or crucifixes which remind us of what Jesus suffered for us.

Let no one dare to suggest, as certain Protestants have done, that to honour the Cross is really an impiety, such as a son might commit if he were to venerate the gibbet on which his father was hung, or the sword by which he had been killed.—It is, indeed, quite clear that, if his father were guilty, the gibbet or the sword of justice

would be, to the son, an instrument of shame. But if, on the other hand, his father had nobly fallen for his religion or for his country, the gibbet or the sword would be really an evidence of his courage. On that ground they would deserve the honour and the veneration of the victim's son. And thus it is that we honour the true Cross and its representations, because it is the proof and the memorial of the courage and the incomprehensible love of our divine Lord, the instrument of His victory, and also the means of our redemption and salvation.

Hence no one has any right to be surprised because Christians have surrounded the Cross with tokens of respect and glorification. This was mere justice. The Cross had its share in the penalty, and it is only right that it should be held in honour.

Doubtless, in the beginning of Christianity, before Constantine forbade the Roman world to sentence the condemned to crucifixion, 'it must have seemed a somewhat difficult thing to introduce as a feature of the new worship something which had been in use for the punishment of criminals. Still, from the earliest times we find evidences which bear testimony in a hidden way to faith in and veneration for the Cross. We know that the early Christians made use of ideographic signs or symbols for the concise expression of their thoughts. One of the oldest was the

anchor, a secret sign of the Cross, and it had the advantage of representing both our Lord's Cross and the hopes that it stands for. Marucchi affirms that the anchor is found in the earliest portions of the Roman catacombs, either engraved on tombstones or painted on the covers of monuments, which may be dated as belonging to the first century. . . . The trident, which has some analogy with the cross, is not quite so early as the anchor. It, too, was used to symbolize the sign of our salvation, and it was afterwards found along with the *ichthus*, or the symbolic fish. The Greek "T," *crux commissa*, was also used in the same way, and, in the third century, Clement of Alexandria calls this letter the symbol of our Lord."*

Thus in early days the Christians loved to make representations of the Cross, dissimulated in various forms or monograms for the sake of prudence. Moreover, they usually made it on small articles, such as reliquaries, jewels, lamps, because such things as these were more easily hidden and withdrawn from the profane curiosity of the heathen.

"Still, we may well suppose," says M. Marucchi, "that Christians in their private devotion were already making use of crosses, and even of crucifixes, as seems to be shown by the blasphemous crucifix found on the

* *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, article Croix.

Palatine,"* in a part of the contemporary palace of Septimus Severus; a parody of the cross, which presupposes that the crucifix was in use amongst Christians.

And is not the use of the sign of the Cross itself a way of venerating the sign of our salvation? But the old Fathers tell us that it is of apostolic origin. "Whatever we do," says Tertullian,† "when we go out or come in, when we put on our clothes, when we are on the way to take a bath, when we are at table, in bed, sitting down or getting a light, we make the sign of the Cross on our foreheads. Such practices as these are not commanded by Holy Scripture, but they are taught by tradition, custom supports them, and faith observes them."

In the first ages, however, there were measures of prudence to be kept. But this was no longer the case after the victory which established the empire of Constantine had followed upon the glorious apparition of the Cross bearing the words: *In hoc signo vinces* ("By this sign shalt thou conquer").

The prince, after his victory through the Cross, was not ungrateful. Out of respect for the Saviour's Cross, the penalty of crucifixion

* *Eléments d'archéologie chrétienne*, i, 312.—A pagan representation of the cross. A man with an ass's head is crucified, and a worshipper is near him: underneath is written: "Alexamenos worshipping God."

† *De coronâ militis*, iii, iv.

was abolished. The Cross was inscribed upon the Roman standard. By degrees, the use of the Cross itself, and not merely of symbolic monograms, became general and public. Usually, even in the fourth century, the Cross was still bare; but from the fifth century the Cross with Christ attached to it became common. And the worship and honour and confidence shown towards the sign of the Cross which first overcame the devil still continues to put him to flight; in a word, public devotion to the Cross is constantly on the increase.

The Cross crowns our churches; it is stamped on medals and coins. As a golden jewel set with precious stones it is found in the crowns of kings, while as a sign of honour in plain metal it decks the breast of the brave. It is found on tombs as well as in the houses of the living. Everywhere it is glorified, and everywhere Christians treat it with honour, and put their confidence in it.

Doubtless, the worship paid to it is not like the worship paid to the Eucharist, nor is it quite the same as that paid to the Sacred Heart. The worship paid to the manhood of Christ, considered in its integrity or in only one of its constituent parts, as, for instance, in the Heart, is a worship of absolute adoration, since it is directly addressed to the manhood of Christ hypostatically united to the person of the Word. The worship paid to the Cross is only indirectly

addressed to the person of Christ; directly it is addressed to the relic of the Passion if it be a question of venerating the true Cross, and to the memorial of the Passion if it be a case of the crucifix.

Nevertheless, it must be well noted that it does not stop at the Cross itself; it goes on to the Crucified.

And this is why theologians tell us that the Cross may be honoured with a relative worship of adoration. This is why, on Good Friday the Cross is adored, and the knee is bent before it. It is because we really adore Jesus Christ Himself thereby. It is with reference to Him, and because of Him, that we pay our homage to the Cross.

Protestants say that this is idolatry. We reply with Bossuet:* “Everyone can see quite clearly that the Church adores Him who bore our sins on the tree, when she is before the Cross. It shows but a poor sense of justice to term idolatrous that religious impulse which makes us bare our heads and bow down before the image of the Cross in memory of Him who was crucified for the love of us; and he would be too blind who did not perceive the utter difference there is between those who trust in idols because they believe in their divinity, and those who, like ourselves, declare that they only make

* *Exposition de la Doctrine catholique sur les matières de controverse*, v.

use of an image in order to uplift their mind to heaven, so as to honour Jesus Christ who is there."

When we show respect and veneration to the Cross, when we have confidence in its power, we really show respect and veneration and confidence in Jesus Christ Himself. It is, therefore, quite right for us to have a true devotion to the Cross.

II.

Above all should we wish to benefit by the teaching of the Cross.

Are not the Cross, the crucifix, and the sign of the Cross the epitome of all Catholic dogma? The Person of the Crucified, the only Son of God the Father, conceived in the womb of Mary by the operation of the Holy Ghost, reminds us of the two great mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The instrument of His sufferings tells us of the mystery of the Redemption, and of original sin.

And are not the Cross, the crucifix, and the sign of the Cross also a memorial of Christian morality? Pagan morality said: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." In opposition to such principles, the Cross says to us: "Ye who are Christ's, crucify your flesh with its vices and concupiscences."

"Cast thine eyes upon the crucifix, O my

soul," says Father de Granada.* "This sorrowful Cross condemns my pleasures, and my sensuality; this bareness condemns all excess and superfluity in my tastes; this crown of thorns, my luxury and vanity; this vinegar and hyssop, my intemperance and daintiness in eating and drinking; these arms outstretched to embrace both friend and foe, my resentment and hatred; this prayer for His executioners, my outbursts against those who have wronged me; this heart opened for all men my hardness of heart which is so closed against my brethren; these dim tear-stained eyes, the vanity and wantonness of my eyes. . . ."

Numerous, one might say innumerable, are the lessons of the crucifix. A look cast upon that emblem often teaches more than any book or sermon. The crucifix is to be found on the breast of the missionary who carries the news of the Gospel into far-distant lands; and the sight of it comforts and supports him, and fires him with zeal amidst his difficult labours. The crucifix is the joy of the dying Christian, and it gives him the strength he needs to overcome the terrors of the death-bed. It teaches the afflicted one to endure suffering with patience, the despised one to forgive all wrongs. In various circumstances, it strengthens and encourages one to resist the allurements of

sin, to sacrifice oneself for souls, to be patient and gentle and self-denying, and to be charitable and zealous and self-sacrificing.

Especially does it impress us with the malice of sin, the preciousness of the soul, and the love of God; and these three lessons deserve to be considered at greater length.

It teaches us the malice of sin, and the hatred we should feel towards it.

If we imagine what hell is, and think upon the torments of the damned, we are struck with horror and get some notion of the enormity of sin, and the word of Holy Scripture: "Flee from sin as one flees from a serpent" seems hardly adequate.

But, on the contrary, before a crucifix how is it possible for us to be as cold and indifferent as we often are? It is, indeed, because we have not learnt to fathom the mystery of it. If we were to study it and to meditate upon it, it would tell us even more emphatically than the miserable eternity of the torments of hell, of the malice of sin, and of what efforts we should make to avoid it.

Those who suffer the torments of hell are but men, and He who is pictured to us as suffering on the cross is a God. But if it be true that the least of the sufferings of a God is incomparably greater than the loss of all creatures, this alone should have a deeper lesson for us than all the rest. Man,

despite his greatness, despite his being made in the image of God, is but a creature of nothingness, and, to make use of a common comparison, he is, in reference to God, less than is a worm with reference to ourselves. What proportion can be set up between the destruction of thousands of little worms and the slaying of a man? For the same reason, how can any proportion be established between the sufferings of mere creatures, and the Passion and Death of a God? If, then, in order to conceive of hell as the right and necessary punishment of guilty men, we must acknowledge that the gravity of sin is unsurpassed, it follows that to conceive of the death of Jesus as right and necessary, we must acknowledge that the malice of sin defies all comparison, that it is really infinite in some of its aspects.

He who is represented as suffering on the cross is a God, and this thought alone should be enough to teach us the wickedness of sin, and to fill us with the most lively horror and detestation of it. Now the crucifix inspires us with this hatred by reminding us of the quantity and the extent of the sufferings endured by the Man-God to expiate all the crimes of mankind, putting before our eyes the blood-stained tragedy of Calvary.

There we see Jesus crowned with thorns, and tortured with the most terrible sufferings. The thongs of the scourges have torn

His limbs, His hands and feet are pierced with nails, His blood streams down on all sides; He suffers in body, and its exquisite sensibility further sharpens and intensifies every pain; in His soul He is tormented with anguish, discouragement, dereliction, and distress. Against Him all is set in array, the past, the present, and the future. Man and God turn against Him. He suffers, and all the sorrows in the world are as nothing compared with His. And why has He to endure all this? Why is the expiation He has to undergo so terrible? *Ipse vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras*, "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins."

When we think such thoughts as these, when we witness such a spectacle, how can we help exclaiming from the bottom of our hearts: Ah! cursed for ever be sin which entails such retribution! Let me rather die than commit it! How could I be the executioner of my God, drive the iron deeper into His wounds, force the sharp thorns still more cruelly into His adorable head, and further grieve His heart already drenched with distress and bitterness? The crucifix eloquently reminds us that His sufferings are great enough, far too great for us to add to them by offending Him through disobedience to His holy law.

Thus does the Cross teach us that there

is nothing on earth more hateful than sin. If we well understood this, then, when we were about to yield to temptation, a single glance at the crucifix would pull us up short and keep us in the path of duty.

Further, the crucifix gives us an excellent lesson as to the preciousness of the soul and the esteem we ought to have for it, and what we ought to do to sanctify and save it, whether it be our own or our brother's.

It shows us our God appreciating, and, in a sense at any rate, forming an estimate of the value of man's soul, putting Himself in the scale against it, since He had to pay the price and worth of it in order to ransom and redeem it; and this price and value is Himself, for He gives Himself for it. *Tanti vales quanti Deus*, "Thou art worth a God," is the bold saying of a Father of the Church. Had there been only one man in the world, and had he committed only one mortal sin, Jesus would not have considered it too much to give Himself up on that man's behalf: *Dilexit me, et tradidit semetipsum pro me*, "He hath loved me and given Himself up for me," says the Apostle. *Empti enim estis pretio magno*, "For you have been bought for a great price." . . . Yes, the price is indeed great, since it is a God. On the cross Jesus reckons our souls as His own blood and life.

Seeing this, how can we consider the

crucifix in earnest and neglect the care of the soul and its salvation? Of a truth, here on earth there is only one thing necessary. Our Lord cannot have made a mistake in His valuation, for He is Intelligence itself. Nothing could prevent Him from saving and sanctifying souls, and surely nothing should stop us from saving and sanctifying ourselves more and more.

No doubt we shall meet with difficulties; the crucifix itself shows this. Jesus Himself had to work, and to suffer, and to die. His disciples, too, are bound to toil and to face difficulties, if they are to save and to sanctify their souls. It costs us something to keep ourselves in a state of grace, and it is all the more costly the more we learn to reckon the value of the soul at its true price; and it also costs much to strive after perfection, to try to make progress every day, to acquire greater virtue, to avoid the least faults more and more. But if we are sometimes tempted to discouragement, to cry out as the Apostles did, "It is a hard thing, who can bear it?" if we sometimes feel that we are brought to a standstill by the difficulties of our task, let us look at Jesus. The sight of His Cross will remind us of the inherent difficulties in the way of salvation, and it will give us the strength and the courage to surmount them. Privations, pains, toils, difficulties, griefs: sanctification and spiritual

perfection are worth more than all of these, for they cost the sufferings and the death of a God. Since Jesus Christ had to suffer so much to win perfect worshippers for His Father, are we to be satisfied with doing nothing to sanctify ourselves? He fought the battle in order to be glorified, and do we want to be crowned without fighting at all? He shows us the way, He goes on in front to give us a lead, and are we going to be afraid of wounds, when He is wounded, and are we going to hang back, to refuse to follow Him, and to run away at the first check? How can we be such dainty members when our Head is crowned with thorns?

Thus it is that the crucifix speaks to our souls. But lastly, it gives us a special lesson in God's love for us, and in the love we ought to have for our Saviour in return.

On all sides, in all our circumstances, and within ourselves, we may find and admire the signs of God's loving-kindness. This universe which was made for man, the soul and body which we owe to the divine bounty, tell us clearly that we are the creatures of love. But the Cross tells us this still more plainly.

It shows us our God giving us more than His gifts, more than His presence, giving up His blood and His life, that which He Himself proclaimed to be the highest possible evidence of love: *majorem dilectionem nemo*

habet ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis.

Strictly speaking, He might have been satisfied with becoming incarnate: a single sigh of His, being of an infinite value, would have sufficed to save the world; but that would not have been enough to testify His love as He desired. For what is the great sign of love that no one can deny or dispute? Sacrifice. As long as we have done nothing that costs us much for anyone, he may very well ask himself if he is really loved, but if he sees self-sacrifice on our part, he cannot have any doubts. Above all, he cannot hesitate if sacrifice involves the laying down of one's life. Life is the first of all goods, the one good that is indispensable for the possession of all the rest; we sacrifice all other goods to preserve it, and the mere thought of death fills us with dread. Hence, to give one's life for another is to make the greatest of sacrifices for him, to give him the highest proof of one's love and devotion.

And is not this especially the case, if that life be given up amidst tortures and the cruellest of sufferings? To give up life amidst torments as painful as death itself—is not that to give it up twice over? And this is the sign and proof, the inevitable mark of love, which we are reminded of by the crucifix.

If Jesus gives up His life, it is not because the cruelties of His enemies force Him to do so, it is of His own free will and because He is urged on by love. When His enemies cried out to Him at Calvary: "Come down from the Cross, and we will believe in Thee," He might have easily done so. In the twinkling of an eye He might have unfastened His hands and feet from that tree of torture. His blood would have vanished, His wounds would have closed, and He would have stood upon the mountain in dreadful majesty. But He did not want to reveal His power but His love, and He knew that love is shown by sacrifice. He trusted in the word of love: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." Yes, it was to win our hearts that He kept His thorns and nails and wounds, His scorns and sorrows. When we look upon the cross, how can we help crying out with St. Paul: "The charity of Christ constraineth us. . . . Nothing shall separate us from the charity of Jesus Christ. . . . If anyone love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema."

The Cross is constantly before our eyes. Would that we might now and then think upon some of the lessons that it teaches! Would that we might reflect upon some of these teachings when we make the sign of the Cross! Too often do we make this

sacred sign on our foreheads mechanically, or in a rather unseemly manner.

The devotion to the Cross is a fundamental Christian devotion. Let us bear this in mind. Let us give the crucifix the place of honour in our rooms or houses. And every morning and evening let us kneel down before it to pray.

If we have honoured the Cross in this world, if we have profited in this life by its teaching, then in eternity we shall share in the glory of the Crucified, our divine Redeemer.

CHAPTER VII

THE WAY OF THE CROSS: THE STATIONS

WE have dealt with the worship of the Cross, but now we have to study separately one special and very popular form of that worship, the Stations of the Cross. This is all the more profitable because a great many Christians are unaware of its historic origin and of its exact nature, and there are also many who understand neither its greatness nor its advantages.

I.

The Gospel teaches us that the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John were together at the foot of the Cross at the time of our Lord's death. When, and how, did she come to be there? We know not, but we may well suppose that she had followed her divine Son from the Prætorium to Calvary along with the holy women and the well-beloved disciple.

"These holy places were thenceforward so dear to her motherly heart," says a pious tradition, "that she took pleasure in re-

visiting them and thinking of the sufferings of Jesus." "In the year 345 of the Seleucian era" [*i.e.*, A.D. 34], thus we read in the Syriac translation of an apocryphal account of the death of the Blessed Virgin, "our Lady Mary left her house and went to the grave of the Messias, because it was her custom to resort thither every day to weep. But . . . the Jews had given orders that if anyone came to pray at the grave, or at Golgotha, he was immediately to be put to death. . . . And the guards came and told the priests: 'Mary goeth thither to pray every night and morning.' And all Jerusalem was astir about Lady Mary; and the priests came to the magistrate, and told him, saying: 'Sir, bid Mary to come no more to pray at the grave, nor at Golgotha.'"*

"Our Blessed Lady," says Brother Fabri, a fourteenth-century Dominican, repeating the same tradition, "once upon a time took care to visit the Most Holy Places of Jerusalem and neighbourhood. Early in the morning, just before daybreak, after receiving Holy Communion at the hand of St. John on Mount Sion, she went forth with her attendants and entered into the great chamber wherein the Last Supper had been prepared; and there she meditated on the

* The Departure of my Lady Mary from this world, *Journal of Sacred Literature*, April, 1865, a translation from a sixth-century Syrian MS.

immense benefit which had been conferred upon the race of mankind in that place: she sounded the depths of the most profound of mysteries, and kissed the spot where her divine Son had taken His seat. Thence she went to the house of Annas, the High Priest; and, after praying there, she entered into the hall of Caiphas, and reflected bitterly upon the sufferings endured by her Son in this building. Thereupon she went down from Mount Sion, passed through the town, and betook herself to the rock of the Cross, which she embraced and kissed most tenderly, weeping for her dear Son who had been crucified there, and nevertheless rejoicing in the devotion He had thus testified towards those He had redeemed. Then, going into the garden of our Lord's sepulchre, she betook herself to the place where the body of her Son and Lord had been anointed and embalmed, and there she cast herself upon her knees, and kissed the stone. Thence, after rising in haste, she turned her steps towards our Lord's tomb, and descending into the vault, and kissing the sepulchre, she was therein filled with an ineffable joy. Afterwards, leaving these Holy Places, she went down from the Hill of Calvary towards the gate of the town; and on the way she called to mind how her Son had been led forth from the town by that road bearing His heavy Cross; and wherever she had seen her

Son fall under the weight of His Cross, or the victim of some exceptional outrage, she knelt down and prayed."*

The tradition above reproduced adds that the Apostles also loved to pay frequent visits to the Way of Sorrow, and that, following their example, the faithful of Jerusalem and Palestine were accustomed to go often thither to reflect upon the price of our redemption.

Such is believed to be the origin of the Way of the Cross.

Whatever may be the historical accuracy of this tradition, which is hard to substantiate, since contemporary evidence is lacking, Christian antiquity attests in the most explicit way that the places hallowed by our Saviour's sufferings and death were from the earliest times specially venerated and revered by the disciples of the Crucified.

Vain were the efforts in A.D. 173 of the Emperor Adrian to suppress these Christian traditions by forbidding to the faithful all access and cultus of the Holy Places. In vain did he profane the Holy Sepulchre by erecting a temple of Jupiter on it, and the Hill of Calvary by building a temple of Venus. Such works only helped to make the sacred localities better known, and to preserve them till the time when the

* Fabri, *Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society*, i, p. 505.

"foolishness of the Cross" was to win its official triumph with the conversion of Constantine.

The Holy Places, which the Christians had never lost sight of, then immediately attracted the attention of the converted Emperor. His mother, the Empress Helena, herself went to the Holy Land. After having the pagan edifices pulled down, and the ground cleared, she discovered the three crosses, and the nails and other instruments of the Passion. Astonishing miracles, and amongst these the resurrection of a dead man, led to the discovery of our Saviour's Cross, distinguishing it from those of the two thieves. Splendid sanctuaries were raised within a few years at the place of the Sepulchre and on the Mount of Olives. Religion took a fresh impetus, and Christians flocked in greater numbers than ever to Jerusalem to follow the Way of Sorrow. "There are pilgrims of every nation and of every language," wrote St. Jerome to Marcella in the fourth century, "and in this multitude of all sorts disorder and licentiousness are unknown; all are animated with the same feelings of veneration for the Holy Places."

Pilgrimages to Jerusalem continued during the centuries that followed, even until after the seventh century, when Palestine had succumbed to the Mussulman rule. The

Mohammedans allowed most of the monuments of Christian veneration to survive, and accorded access to some of them to those who agreed to pay the exorbitant charges exacted from the pilgrims.

Of course, the Crusades still further increased the devotion to the Holy Places. In each Crusade, as historians tell us, besides the armed crusaders there were hundreds and thousands of pilgrims, clergy, monks, women, and children, who wished to visit the places which had been hallowed by our Redeemer's sufferings. "You will fight against the infidels," said they to the warriors, "on our behalf; we will suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ."*

But considering the difficulty of the communications and the fatigues and dangers of the travelling, it was very hard for those who had once been to Palestine to make a second journey thither. And this gave many of them the idea of trying to reproduce in their own homes a pattern, however imperfect it might be, of the venerated scenes and monuments they had visited.

No doubt this is the origin of the celebrated church of the *Anastasis* (*the Resurrection*) at Constantinople, and of the Roman churches of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem,

* Michaud: *Histoire des Croisades*, livre XXI, ch. vi.

and of St. Mary Major or *ad Præsepe* (*at the Crib*), the latter intended to serve in some sort as a pendant to Constantine's basilica of Bethlehem. No doubt the same reason accounts for a fourth-century representation of the principal monuments of the Holy City on a mosaic in the still existing apse of St. Pudentia's.

It must be admitted that until about the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Way of the Cross was not followed outside of Jerusalem; and the representations of the Stations of the Holy City were rather rare. But, from the fifteenth century, they became more numerous.

It was the Franciscans, who had charge of the Holy Places since 1342 and regularly made the Stations of the Cross either by themselves or accompanied by pilgrims, to whom was due the introduction of the Stations of the Way of Sorrows in their European convents. They had many imitators. Quantities of the religious, secular priests, and even private individuals, after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land desired to reproduce by statuary, pictures, or bas-reliefs the Stations of the Cross, either in their gardens or houses, and they also were wont to use them for purposes of prayer. And thus it was that the devotion to the Way of the Cross gradually spread, and this all the more because the Popes accorded to

all those who made the Stations the same indulgences as to travellers who visited the Holy Places at Jerusalem.

Finally, the extraordinary zeal of St. Leonard of Port Maurice in the eighteenth century in preaching this devotion made it both universal and popular, so that in Catholic countries to-day there is scarcely a parish, a religious house, or even an oratory, which does not possess its Stations of the Cross.

II.

The Stations of the Cross are properly marked by a series of wooden crosses set at fixed intervals from each other. They should be fourteen* in number to correspond

* Formerly the number of the Stations might be either more or less. In the seventeenth century some places showed eighteen. The first was the Cenacle; the second the cave of the Agony in the Garden of Olives; the third the gate of the Garden of Olives where Jesus was arrested; the fourth the brook Cedron into which He was flung through the brutality of those who came to seize Him; and then came in succession, the houses of Annas, and of Caïphas, and of Herod, the place of the Scourging, Pilate's Prætorium, the arch of the *Ecce Homo* where our Lord was set against Barabbas, the place where Mary fainted on seeing her divine Son bearing His Cross towards Calvary, the cross-roads where our Lord fell beneath the weight of the Cross and was helped up by Simon the Cyrenean, the place where the holy women of Jerusalem wept on seeing our Lord, the house belonging to St. Veronica

with the stations actually visited in making the Way of the Cross at Jerusalem.

The common practice is to associate pictures or bas-reliefs with the crosses. These scenes represent the episodes of the Passion from the condemnation of Jesus to His death and burial. Nevertheless, the statuary or pictures are not necessary.

As to the making of the Stations of the Cross, this is done by going from station to station, and in meditating for a short time at each of them upon the Passion of our Saviour.

who wiped her Saviour's face, the bar of judgment where our Lord heard His sentence passed, Calvary where He was crucified between two thieves, the Holy Sepulchre where His body was laid, and the Mount of Olives whence He ascended into heaven after His resurrection.—In other places sometimes only nine, six, or four stations were to be found.

Moreover, we must not attach any historical importance to many of the features that are commonly to be found in the scenes represented in some of the stations. For instance, on His way to Calvary did Jesus actually fall down several times? Probably He did, but nevertheless there is no trace of this in ante-mediæval tradition. Did St. Veronica really wipe our Saviour's face? As documentary evidence is wanting, we find authorities divided.

While the Church attaches numerous indulgences to the Stations of the Cross, she does not thereby mean to guarantee the entire historicity of every detail which they offer as subject-matter for meditation.

To gain the indulgences it is not necessary to meditate upon the episode represented in the Station at which a stop is made; it is enough to meditate in a general way upon the Passion. Nor is it necessary to recite an "Our Father," a "Hail, Mary," or some other vocal prayer at each Station, for a very short meditation suffices. And thus it is that the Stations of the Cross are used in the churches or oratories in which they are to be found.

On behalf of those who cannot betake themselves to a place where the Stations of the Cross can be followed, the Sovereign Pontiffs have modified the above rules. The sick, and those who are kept at home, may gain the indulgences attached to the visiting of the Stations by holding in their hands a specially indulgenced crucifix, and reciting twenty *Paters*, *Aves*, and *Glorias* with piety and contrition.

III.

By performing the Stations of the Cross one may gain all the indulgences, both plenary and partial, which may be gained by following the actual traces of the Way of Sorrows at Jerusalem.

At various times, especially during the Middle Ages, Popes have enriched the pious performance of the Way of the Cross at

Jerusalem with all kinds of spiritual favours. And from the time of the seventeenth century, in virtue of concessions granted by the Sovereign Pontiffs, following the example of Innocent XI, all these favours may be participated in by visiting the ordinary Stations of the Cross. Hence this exercise is one of those by which the greatest number of indulgences may be gained.

Now, what are these indulgences? They cannot be definitely specified, for the documents which set them forth have been destroyed. This took place in a fire in the church of the Holy Sepulchre during the pontificate of Pius V. For fear of making a mistake the Sovereign Pontiffs have forbidden any list of them to be drawn up. But it is certain that the indulgences were very numerous, and that they were applicable to souls in purgatory.

IV.

When we know how valuable indulgences are, how advantageous it is to gain them for oneself, and how one can help the holy souls in purgatory by gaining them for their intention, then the mere consideration of the extraordinary indulgences attached to the Stations of the Cross is a powerful encouragement to the performance of this pious exercise of visiting them. This consideration,

moreover, has had much to do with popularizing its use.

But even if visiting the Stations of the Cross were enriched by no indulgences at all, it would still be much to be recommended and practised, at any rate from time to time, and that by men as well as women.

If we look at it with reference to Jesus Christ, the practice helps us to enter into sympathy with the sufferings of our Lord. And is it not right that we should do this? If we accompany our Master in spirit on the way of Calvary, He will not be able to say to us as He did once upon a time: "I looked about and there was none to help: I sought, and there was none to give aid." He will not be able to say: "I looked for one that would comfort Me, and I found none." For we shall be there; we shall comfort Him, along with the daughters of Jerusalem, lamenting the coldness of all the indifferent; we shall comfort Him, along with the Magdalene, kissing His feet nailed to the Cross; we shall comfort Him above all, along with Mary, His Blessed Mother, as she goes with us side by side from Station to Station. We shall be with her when she meets Jesus on the way, with her we shall embrace Him in our arms when He is taken down from the Cross, and wash and lay Him out with our hands.

If we consider the Way of the Cross in

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reference to ourselves, it imparts to the soul a light and strength which we should look for in vain elsewhere. How many of the faithful, especially in Holy Week or during a retreat, in performing the Stations of the Cross have learnt as they never learnt before the necessity of reforming their whole lives, of being more generous, and have made a fresh start with renewed courage !

Sometimes people ask for methods to help them to stir themselves to compunction for their sins, and to encourage them to face the difficulties of doing their duty, but I know of none so moving, none so effective, as a well-made series of visits to the Stations of the Cross.

As we go from station to station we shall exclaim: "What ! was it for me that my God was unjustly condemned to death, that He bends beneath the heavy burden of the Cross as He ascends the steep road, that He falls down crushed by its terrible weight, that He is overwhelmed with insults and outrage, and that He is fastened to the painful and shameful gallows-tree ? And it was for me that His dead body lies on Mary's knees and is covered with wounds ! And shall I not be sorry for my sins which are the cause of all this suffering ? And, whatever be the cost, shall I not be brave enough to do my duty rather than offend and crucify my Saviour ?".

Thus it is that the Way of the Cross may wonderfully rouse us to contrition and generous acts of goodwill.

Furthermore, it may be a preventive of all sorts of discouragement. For unfortunately there are times when we find ourselves ready to say with the Prophet: *Tædet animam meam vitæ meæ* ("My soul is weary of my life"). This occurs when, after the best of resolutions, a Catholic relapses into some of the old shortcomings. Then he is tempted to let himself go, as if it were useless to continue the fight. What crisis is more to be dreaded than that of discouragement?

But he will not succumb who puts aside all human respect and follows in the footsteps of Jesus along the Way of the Cross. He, too, fell down by the way, He fell three times; but three times He rose again. Can those who follow in His traces do less? They will say to themselves, like St. Francis of Sales: "O my poor heart, here we are down in the ditch which we were so determined to avoid! Come, let us pick ourselves up again, let us call upon the divine mercy, and let us put our trust therein! Let us have confidence!" And their confidence will be restored, they will rise again, and, comforted by Jesus Christ, they will continue to ascend their Calvary in His company.

Here, too, we might show how the School

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of the Way of the Cross teaches patience under trials and to forgive those who trespass against us. If we suffer, did not Jesus suffer before us? If we are humiliated and outraged, was not He, the God of Heaven, abominably dragged through the mud, made the rival of a criminal, and buffeted, and did He not forgive those who were His executioners?

But there is no room to pass in review all the many considerations, however salutary they may be for our souls, to be drawn from visiting the Stations of the Cross. They are to be found in almost every book of devotion amongst the meditations given for the performance of this holy exercise.

At all times, despite the many fatigues and dangers involved, there have been quantities of pilgrims to the Holy Land to venerate the Holy Places hallowed by our Saviour's Passion. But without having all these hardships to face, thanks to the Stations of the Cross, we can really participate in the spiritual favours which they do so much to secure.

Let us learn to understand that the visits to the Stations of the Cross are an exercise that brings glory to God, salvation to the soul, and benefit to the faithful departed, whom we may thus help to escape from the fires of purgatory.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LITURGICAL SEASONS

WE must not close our study of devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ without considering the seasons of the liturgical year.

Some of the old frescoes in the catacombs show us our Lord as the Good Shepherd in the middle of an arch, round which the seasons are symbolically represented. Whether this is the result of a mere chance stroke of the brush used in an ornamental effort, or whether it be done with symbolic intention, certain it is that these paintings express a profound thought: to the Christian the centre of the Church's year is Christ.

Every year the Church makes Him live His life over again before our eyes in order to revive His life in our hearts. Every year she bids us to contemplate Him, born in the crib, fasting in the desert, sacrificing Himself on the cross, rising again from the tomb, ascending to the right hand of His Father, and sending the Holy Ghost. The feasts of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints cluster around His, and towards Him all converges, for He governs all.

If only we are able to enter into the spirit of the divisions of this ecclesiastical year, we shall reap many and most precious fruits. Each of our Lord's mysteries is full of lessons, and contains for us especial graces. Therefore, in order to participate in them as we ought, let us make a study of the various ecclesiastical seasons, of their origin and nature, and of the way in which we should hallow each one of them.

I.

Easter was *the* feast *par excellence* among the Jews. The Apostles and the early disciples for the most part came out of Judaism, and they could not forget their Passover. They were all the readier to recall it because they associated it with the institution of the Eucharist, and with the Passion and the Resurrection.

Hence Easter, especially as linked with the memory of the Resurrection, at once became in their eyes a great feast.

Amongst the Jews the Passover was celebrated on the 14th of Nisan, a lunar month beginning about our 15th of March. Already in the second century Christians discussed the time of its celebration, whether it should be kept or not kept on the same day as the Jewish feast. After a prolonged controversy which lasted until the fourth century, the

Roman Church secured the general acceptance of the custom to celebrate Easter on the Sunday after the 14th of Nisan—that is to say, on the Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox, a Sunday which always falls between March 21 and April 26.

Then the resurrection of our Saviour was solemnly celebrated. But quite early it was felt that His birth also was worthy of a solemn celebration, and hence Christmas came to be instituted.

“Christmas and Easter were the two poles of the liturgical year, and about these two points the other feasts came to be gathered.”* The other memories of the life of Jesus, of His hidden, public, suffering, or glorious life, followed in close succession, coming after one another in natural order.

Christmas and Easter involved seasons of preparation, Advent and Lent; thus the whole cycle of the ecclesiastical year was constituted.

II.

The four weeks before Christmas begin the liturgical year, and make what is called the season of Advent, from the word *adventus*, meaning “coming”—*i.e.*, the season that recalls to us and makes us reflect upon the coming of our Lord.

Dom Cabrol, *Origines liturgiques*, p. 175.

This coming is both simple and threefold. It is simple, because it is always one and the same Jesus Christ who comes; and it is threefold, because He comes in three sets of circumstances, and in three different ways, of which the Church desires to remind us.

The first of these comings is that whereby the divine Word came into the world when He was made man. The second is the coming of Jesus into our souls, and His reigning in us by grace. The third is that which will take place on the last day, when Jesus will appear in glory to judge the living and the dead.

These are the three comings which the Church desires to honour, to represent, and to recall to the minds of the faithful during the season of Advent. This intention is shown in all her ceremonies and prayers. To express it, the Church borrows the inspired tones of the Prophets. One after the other she makes us listen to the words of David, of Isaias, and of St. John Baptist.—She prays for the coming of Christ on the earth.—She prays especially for His coming into the soul, into her living members to sanctify them still more, into those who are dead to grace, to restore life to them, into those who do not even belong to her, for whom nevertheless the Redeemer came.—Lastly, she yearns for the third coming, which will consummate all things by opening the door of eternity, the time of complete

deliverance, in which there will be no more striving or sorrow or death. But she does not forget that that will be also a terrible day, and she takes advantage of that circumstance to awaken us to a salutary fear, which is in perfect harmony with a season of penitence and preparation.

Hence during Advent we should endeavour to renew, like the Prophets, the times when people called upon God to open the heavens to send the promised Saviour into the world; we should prepare our hearts to receive His grace and, at the same time, we should think of that final coming of Christ which the early Christians looked forward to with awe and impatience, a time which the hour of his own death brings home to every man; since, however numerous the centuries to come may be, our lot is irrevocably fixed at the moment of death.

In former days, Advent was a time of fasting. The councils of Tours (563) and of Mâcon (581) refer to a season before Christmas beginning on St. Martin's day, November 11, and prescribing Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, as fasting days. That made a kind of Lent of about forty days' duration. In Advent, fasting is still observed in the Greek Church and in many monasteries; even in the Latin Church there is every sign of a time of penance. The solemnization of matrimony is forbidden,

just as in Lent. Organs are no longer heard in church. In our ecclesiastical ceremonies the ornaments in use are violet, the penitential colour. The *Gloria in excelsis* and the *Te Deum* are done away with. Nevertheless, the joyful *Alleluia* is still heard, for the sadness of the season is pregnant with hope, in expectation of the happy night which is to bring us a Saviour.

III.

Advent, indeed, does not end in mournful memories, such as are found in the Passiontide at the close of Lent and before Easter. It leads on directly to Christmas, and Christmas is pre-eminently the feast of joy.

In olden times in France "Noël, Noël!" was the glad cry with which joyful events were greeted. Noël (Christmas) is the joy of the creature receiving its God now become man through love. The office of the day is filled to the full with the feeling of the gladness of the human race, which now sees its deliverer, the Messiah and Redeemer, so impatiently looked for throughout the ages. So great is the Church's joy on this feast that, even if it fall on a Friday, the law of abstinence is dispensed.*

* Since the decree of July 2, 1911, restricting the number of Days of Obligation, the abstinence has been dispensed for all such feasts falling on a Friday.

Another characteristic of this feast is the three Masses, the composition of which suggests to our consideration the birth of our Saviour from three different points of view. Jesus Christ's birth in time is put before us by the midnight Mass. The Mass at dawn by its Introit, Collects, Epistle, Gospel, etc., recalls His spiritual birth in the souls of the Shepherds and of Christians. The Mass in the daytime celebrates the mystery of His eternal birth in the Father's bosom.

As for the season of Christmas, it lasts forty days, and ends with the feast of the Purification on February 2. It is devoted to the memory of the mysteries of the birth and childhood of our Saviour: the Nativity, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, and the Presentation in the Temple. During the whole of this time the Church's dominant thought is one of joy, gratitude, and love, for the divine gift made by heaven to earth.

The custom of representing the Holy Child in the Crib at Christmastide is a very old one. From the *Liber Pontificalis* we learn that these Cribs were very common in the eighth century in Rome, and that they copied the Crib at St. Mary Major's. But St. Francis of Assisi was the great propagator of the custom, and it is due to his preaching of it that it has become so universal.*

* Vacandard: *Études de critique et d'histoire religieuse*, 3 série, 44, 45.

Christians should make use of Christmas-tide to pray to God with the utmost confidence, because He willed to become like us in order to make Himself more accessible to us. But they should also profit by it to meditate upon the wonderful example with which He has provided us by His birth, desiring to teach us by His deeds even more than by His words.* Over against man's pride the Divine Child sets the example of His humility: "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man."† And He teaches obedience: "Then said I: Here I am: Behold, I come . . . to do Thy will, O God."‡ He teaches, too, a just estimate of riches: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich He became poor for your sakes: that through His poverty you might be rich."§ Now, who could preach these virtues and all the rest more amiably than the Holy Child in the Crib? But what He reveals to us in the most striking way in the mystery of Christmas is God's love for men: "For God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son."|| And from this the following conclusion is naturally drawn: "Let us therefore love God, because He hath first

* Acts i. 1. † Phil. ii. 7. ‡ Heb. x. 7.
 § 2 Cor. viii. 9. || John iii. 16.

loved us.”* And this is the invitation given to us by the Church in the words of the *Adeste*: *Sic nos amantem quis non redamaret*, “Who would not love in return Him who has so loved us?”

IV.

The Sundays after Epiphany are so arranged as to fill up the time before Septuagesima.

“The season denoted by the latter word comprises the three weeks before Lent. It is one of those liturgical periods of secondary origin arising from the desire to make all the weeks and Sundays of the year take their place in the liturgical scheme, and receive designations and functions corresponding with their place. These three weeks immediately precede Lent, and partake of its characteristics of penance, mourning, and preparation for the feast of Easter and for Baptism. The lections of Lent go back quite naturally as far as Septuagesima Sunday.

“Thus Septuagesima naturally leads on to Lent, the oldest, the richest, and, from many points of view, the most interesting of the liturgical seasons.

“The episode that dominates it is our Lord’s forty days’ fast in the wilderness.

“But if we are to understand rightly the

* 1 John iv. 19.

adaptation of certain lections, antiphons, and responsories in the liturgy, we must take account of other things which have played an important part in the formation of the Lenten portion of it.

"The first is this: Lent was a preparation for Baptism. In primitive times, Baptism was given to adults on Easter Eve at night. The catechumens were prepared for the great event during forty days. The Lord's Prayer and the Creed were explained to them clause by clause, and they were taught to listen to a commentary on Genesis and the six days of creation, and on a certain number of passages taken from the Old and New Testaments. This gave rise to several liturgical prayers which have found a place in the Lenten portion of the missal and breviary.

"Another matter that played an important part is the following: Lent was the season in which those who were guilty of graver sins had to undergo severe penance. The Church did not lose sight of them. At the beginning of Lent they put ashes on their heads, as a sign of penance and lamentation. The rite of Ash Wednesday, now applicable to all Christians, is merely a survival of it."*

The most marked characteristic of Lent is penance, the importance and necessity of

* Dom Cabrol: *Le livre de la prière antique*, pp. 244-247.

which in the Christian life, whether from an expiatory or a remedial or a protective point of view, are well known.

The only thing directly prescribed by ecclesiastical law is abstinence from certain kinds of food, but this abstinence is merely a type of other mortifications proper to the season of Lent. In the Lenten hymn for Matins the Church invites her children to deny themselves in speech, eating and drinking, sleep and recreation, to live in greater seclusion, and to avoid all temptations. Thus, all who have good reasons for dispensing themselves from official mortification can nevertheless easily discover ways of practising penance, in conversation, reading, sight-seeing, company, comforts and self-indulgence, eagerness in securing this world's goods, in all of which the circumspect Christian does not fail to watch over himself, and to mortify and correct himself in an especial manner during the season of Lent.

The length and strictness of Lent have varied with times and places. In the second century, in the days of Irenæus, the fast was very short; some fasted one day only, others two days, while some abstained from food forty hours on end. At the beginning of the third century, Tertullian recognizes as the only solemn fast prescribed by the Church the day of the Pasch, *i.e.*, (in the special sense in which he uses the word) the Good

Friday. In Alexandria, about the middle of the third century, they were wont to fast the whole of the week before Easter, some without a break, others at intervals. Of the Forty Days, the Lenten Quarantine, no traces are to be found prior to the fourth century. The fifth canon of the Council of Nice (325) is the oldest text in which it is mentioned. Later it is often referred to, but rather as a preparatory season for Baptism or for the absolution of penitents, or as a time of retreat and recollection for Christians living in the world. Among the exercises of this holy season fasting naturally has an important place, but it greatly varied in different countries.

The strictness of its observance has also changed from place to place and from time to time. Thus, until about the ninth century the days of fasting, even in the West, were kept by allowing only a single meal after sunset. By degrees the time was thrown forward until about three o'clock in the afternoon, but not until about the thirteenth century did it become a settled custom to take this meal at noon, and to have a light collation in the evening.

Moreover, this aspect of penance and expiation is but one of the aspects of Lent. It should be a time of conversion from evil to good, or from good to better, or from the better to perfection.

Lent is still the great season of grace. During this period throughout the Catholic Church there is wrought one of the greatest works achieved in the world, a work that furthers the world's salvation. On all sides there is a manifestation of zealous preaching, the faithful flock to the churches to hear instructions, which now become more easily accessible. On all sides priests are more and more busy in looking after sinners. Then, too, the grace of God grows more operative and influential in men's hearts and souls; and thus year by year humanity is raised from falling upon the slippery slope of evil. It is to aid this movement that the Church recommends to the faithful during Lent, in addition to fasting and penance, meditation, prayer, confession, communion, and all the means that uplift the soul to God.

V.

The two last weeks of Lent make what is called Passiontide, because this particular fortnight is specially devoted to recalling to us the sufferings whereby Jesus Christ wrought our redemption.

With her mind full of these sufferings the Church manifests her sadness and sorrow more and more. To show her mourning, in all the churches the statues of the Saints, including even the crucifix, are covered with a veil.

The fortnight opens with Passion Sunday, but the second week, which immediately precedes Easter, is the most important. It is *the week par excellence*; the Great Week "so called," says St. Chrysostom, "not because it has more days than any other, nor because its days are longer, but because of the greatness of the mysteries that are celebrated in it." It is called Holy Week because of the sacredness of these holy mysteries.

All the days of this week were long observed as holidays. Servile works were forbidden while they lasted, and a law of Theodosius closed all the courts. This Emperor, too, during this time of mercy for sinners used to set prisoners free and to pardon those who were sentenced to death. Other kings, especially those of France, followed his example. Until the time of the French Revolution, at this season the Parliament used to go to the royal prison and to set free those who appeared to be the least guilty. During this week slaves were permitted to stop work, and they were often given their freedom, and the poor received an abundance of alms. Was it not right that the wretched should feel the effects of redemption poured out in such floods upon the world?

All the ceremonies of this week are symbolical, and the Church wishes us to meditate

upon them. She especially desires us to meditate upon all the circumstances of the great mystery of the redemption, so that we may apply its fruits to ourselves, for Jesus Christ's blood would have been shed for us in vain if it failed to sanctify our souls.

VI.

But Jesus only died to rise again, living and glorious. Easter comes to remind us of His victory, and to make us celebrate it. On that day the Church puts on her most beautiful decorations, resuming and repeating over and over again the triumphant *Alleluia*: Praise be to God, glory and honour and victory to Christ risen from the dead, the Conqueror of death and hell.

That day and the fifty days following make up Eastertide, and they are wholly devoted to joy. "All sadness is laid aside, and the Church cannot address a single word to her divine Spouse without an *Alleluia*, the heavenly cry with which the streets and squares of the celestial Jerusalem resound unceasingly, as we are told by the holy liturgy. For nine weeks we have been deprived of this song of admiration and gladness; we had to die with Christ our Victim; but now that we have risen again with Him from the tomb, and that we

intend no more to die that death that slays the soul and that killed our Redeemer on the Cross, the *Alleluia* is our own."*

The dominant thought of Paschal time is the thought of life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is to us a pledge of an eternal and glorious life, and of the resurrection of the body. It is also an invitation to us to live here and now a spiritual, a higher, and a risen life; this is the especial grace of Easter and the Ascension, *quæ sursum sunt quærite, quæ sursum sunt sapite, non quæ super terram.*† We are members of Jesus Christ, and His lot should be ours. "To die again through sin is to renounce Him anew, to separate ourselves from Him, to make His death of no avail to us, and to nullify His resurrection of which we have been partakers. Let us then be watchful to abide in that life which is not of ourselves but nevertheless truly belongs to us, for He who has won it from death has given it to us along with all that is His. O sinners who have recovered the life of grace at Easter, die no more, but do the works of the risen life. And you who are amongst the just, to whom the Paschal mystery has imparted a fresh vitality, show a more abundant life both in your thoughts and in your deeds. Thus shall we all go forward

* Dom Guéranger, *Le temps pascal*.

† Col. iii. 1, 2.

in the new life commended to us by the Apostle,"* the life we ought to live, following the example of our risen Lord.

VII.

Fifty days after the Pasch the Jews celebrated Pentecost. It reminded them of the promulgation of the law on Mount Sinai, fifty days after the flight from Egypt.

Fifty days after the Pasch we, too, celebrate Pentecost, the coming down of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, and the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel.

This it was that was the origin of all the Christian nations with their faith which has achieved such great things. On this day it was that fruitfulness was given to the Christian Church, then only in germ, waiting for the fructifying breath of the Holy Ghost in order to expand.

On this feast the Church calls upon us to let ourselves be filled with the Holy Ghost. She puts into our mouths the beautiful hymn *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, which beseeches for all of us, as for the Apostles, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and sings of its effects upon the soul.

To these great feasts we have only to add those of the Blessed Sacrament and of the Sacred Heart, which are both celebrated

* Dom Guéranger, *Le temps pascal*.

soon after Pentecost, to complete the cycle of festivals connected with our Lord.

VIII.

Thus from Advent to Pentecost the Church recalls the different phases of the life of Jesus Christ. From Pentecost till Advent she concentrates our attention upon the life of the Christian, which should be a copy of the life of Jesus and a preparation for eternal life.

During the whole period of the Sundays after Pentecost the Church's desire is that the faithful should be specially diligent in imploring the grace obtained for them by Jesus Christ, that they should live by it, take care of it, make it bear fruit, and thus win everlasting life.

The ecclesiastical ornaments are now green, a colour symbolic of hope and of that fecundity of nature which is an image of the fecundity of divine grace.

The Sunday offices, which will now become better known since the Sovereign Pontiff has done away with many of the feasts which interfered with the celebration of them, are offices of the greatest beauty. Nothing is fuller of comfort to the soul than the Sunday Introits, Collects, Graduals, and Epistles and Gospels. The thoughts they express, the admirable lessons they contain, cannot

fail to uplift the heart and to enlighten the mind. And all of the prayers in the liturgy are wonderfully chosen to render to God in a worthy way the homage that is due to His divine Majesty.

By her liturgical cycle, whether considered as a whole or in detail, taking the entire course of the ecclesiastical year, the Church's intention is to inspire us to do our duties, especially by means of the lessons and examples contained in the life of Jesus Christ, our pattern and our hope. She desires us to enter into the thoughts which are expressed or symbolized by her feasts and ceremonies.

Let us call to mind a story of Clovis on the day of his Baptism. When he was brought into the cathedral of Rheims, the rich hangings and tapestries, the flashing lights, the holy ornaments, so struck his uncultured imagination that he turned to the bishop and said: "Father, is this the eternal glory which you promised me?" "No, my son," replied the bishop, "but this is a shadow of it, and the path that leads to it." And for us, too, the feasts of the Church, if we understand and appreciate them rightly, are a reflection of heaven itself, and a means of getting there. Let us try to grasp their meaning, to enter fully into their spirit. The liturgy is no dead language, rather is it

an immortal tongue. But its beauties are only revealed to those who make a study of it. Let us make it the subject of our meditations; then, beneath the outer bark of its rites we shall find the deepest meaning of Christianity, the Christ Himself.

And every one of these feasts, if we truly enter into the spirit of it, will be to us a prelude to the eternal feast which we hope we shall one day celebrate in heaven, where Jesus Christ Himself will be the great High Priest.

CHAPTER IX

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

OF all the joys of the soul there is scarcely any finer or sweeter than that of surrounding one's mother with signs of honour and respect, and with the innumerable little attentions suggested by filial tenderness. "There is a generation," exclaims Solomon in tones of scorn, "that doth not bless their mother."* "Hear, my son," says Tobias, "the words of my mouth, and lay them as a foundation in thy heart. When God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body: and thou shalt honour thy mother all the days of thy life; for thou must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee in her womb."†

What is true of our mothers according to nature can only be pre-eminently true of our mother according to grace. Like the dying Tobias, Jesus on the painful death-bed of the Cross leaves us as our heritage Mary to be our mother, recommending her to our love and veneration. The devotion to Mary holds a place apart in the heart of every

* Prov. xxx. 11.

† Tob. iv. 2-4.

true Christian, a place next to the devotion to the adorable person of Jesus.

In this chapter we shall study its principal foundation, the divine maternity that puts Mary in a rank apart, as near as possible to that of the Most Holy Trinity. We shall see how Mary is truly the Mother of God, and we shall inquire into the greatness of the title. We shall also tell how Mary, while really a mother, ever remained a virgin, and we shall answer the objections of infidels who refuse to accord her this miraculous prerogative.

I.

“ If anyone refuse to confess that Emmanuel is truly God, and therefore that the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God, since she brought forth according to the flesh the Word of God made flesh . . . let him be anathema.” Such is the solemn definition laid down in 431 at the Œcumenical Council of Ephesus against the heresiarch Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, who asserted that the Holy Virgin ought not to be called Mother of God but only Mother of Christ. This definition was renewed a few years later in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon; and it was affirmed still more expressly, if that be possible, in 553 at the second Œcumenical Council of Constantinople: “ If anyone does not in a true sense, but only in an improper

sense, call the holy, glorious, and ever-virgin Mary, Mother of God . . . let him be anathema."

Thus does the Church by her Councils affirm that Mary is really and truly Mother of God. But long before she was forced by the sacrilegious negations of Nestorius to make these solemn definitions, she believed and taught it from the beginning as an indisputable truth. It was what was repeated by the early Christians in their various Creeds as we repeat it to-day in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God . . . and in Jesus Christ, *His only Son . . . who was born of the Virgin Mary. . . .*" It was also the doctrine of the Fathers,* who unanimously gave Mary the title of Mother of God. The expression was so current even before the Council of Ephesus that much earlier Julian the Apostate† used to reproach the Christians in these words: "You others cease not to call Mary the Mother of God."

Moreover, is not this the teaching of the Gospel, when it recounts the message of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary:‡ "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall

* Cf. Petavius, *De Incarnatione*, v, 15; and Terrien, *La Mère de Dieu*.

† St. Cyril of Alexandria, l. viii, c. Julian.

‡ Luke i. 31-35.

be called the Son of the Most High. . . . And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God " ? Since Mary's child is the Son of God, Mary is truly the Mother of God.

Following the example of the heretic Nestorius, we should have to maintain that there are two persons in Jesus Christ, a divine person born of God, and a human person born of Mary, in order to affirm that Mary is not the Mother of God. But since there is in Jesus Christ only one person, the divine person of the Word, Mary the mother of Jesus Christ is truly Mother of God.

Of course, Mary is not a goddess, she did not conceive and bring forth the divine nature. But neither did God the Father conceive and bring forth the human nature of the incarnate Word. If, then, the unity of person in Jesus Christ is enough for the eternal Father to be able to say of the Man-God, " This is My well-beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," why does not that same unity of person enable Mary to say of the Word made flesh within her: " This is my son, and to-day I have brought Him forth " ? Each has an equal reason for thus speaking, since each communicates to Jesus Christ the nature belonging to each, and that by way of generation: the Father communicates His divinity, and Mary her humanity. As

St. Thomas justly observes: "The mother may deserve her name, without the whole in which her son consists being derived from her own substance. A mother directly produces her son's body only. In no human being does the soul come directly from his mother,* for God produces the soul directly by creation. Nevertheless, a woman is really the mother of the human being who receives a body from her. In the same way the Blessed Virgin ought to be called the Mother of God, since the body of a God was taken from her substance."

It matters little that her Son existed from all eternity before her. This was one of the objections of Nestorius. "Can anyone believe," he asked, "that a son can be older than his mother?" Clearly not, if he has only one nature. But it is certainly possible, and we ought to believe it, if, pre-existing as God in His divine nature, He borrows, by way of generation, a second nature, which is our own, from a mortal mother. Anterior to His mother according to His divine nature, He becomes posterior to her according to His human nature. He is the Word and the Son of God from the beginning, by His

* Such, indeed, is the common opinion of Catholic philosophers. The soul does not come directly from the parents by way of generation; it is an immediate creation of God at the moment of generation.

eternal generation; He is man and the son of Mary, by His birth in time.

Hence Mary is the Mother of God, and this title confers upon the Blessed Virgin an elevation and dignity unapproached by any other, either human or angelic. Nor must we wonder, say the Doctors, if the Evangelists who record at length the praises of St. John Baptist and St. Mary Magdalen, speak so briefly of Mary; it is enough if they tell us that she is the Mother of Jesus, for that says more than anything else they could say.

Albert the Great was right when he wrote that "immediately next to the glory of being God must be placed the glory of being the Mother of God." According to St. Bonaventure, "God may create a greater world, a wider heaven, but He cannot raise a creature to a loftier height than by making her His Mother."

The greatest masters of theology do not hesitate to affirm that through her divine motherhood Mary's dignity goes in a manner beyond the limits of the finite: *dignitas Matris Dei est suo genere infinita*, writes Suarez, following St. Thomas Aquinas.*

It is not that the Mother of God ceases to be a creature, coming out of nothingness like ourselves. Created by God, she only lives by the continual operation of divine

* Suarez: *De mysteriis Christi*, xix, 9; St. Thomas: *Summa theol.*, i. 9. 25. a. 6.

Omnipotence. In this respect she is one of us, she touches upon and appertains to nothingness. But from another aspect, she touches upon and appertains for ever to the infinite. Like some geometrical figure, the base of which lies close at hand while its lines are lost in immensity, so that we cannot complete them even in imagination, so the motherhood of God is a fact, having a fixed time and place on the earth, but its glory and dignity, and the eternal relation between Mary and God involved in it, are lost in infinity, going far beyond the reach of the highest intelligences, for so sublime is it that God alone can understand its greatness.

By her divine motherhood, indeed, Mary enters into such intimate relationship with the whole of the Blessed Trinity that she seems, as it were, to enter into partnership with It. With the eternal Father she shares the honour of begetting the same Son. She does not beget Him in the same way, since the Father communicates to the Son the divine nature from all eternity, and Mary only communicates to Him His human nature in time, but she begets Him as really. The same Son, who receives from the Father His divine nature, receives from Mary His human nature, and hence He is as truly son of man as He is Son of God.

“O Mary,” cries Bossuet,* “had I even

* 2^e Sermon sur la Nativité.

the mind of an angel, and of one of the highest hierarchy, my conceptions would be too low to understand the union of the eternal Father with thee. Associating thee with His eternal generation He has made thee Mother of the same Son with Himself. He has willed thee to be Mother of His only-begotten Son, and Himself to be the Father of thy son."

To the Son of God who is as infinite as His Father, she gives, if one may so speak, an increase when she gives Him by her own blood the power to suffer, to die, and to merit, providing Him thus with the elements required for the fulfilment of His mission, and the blood which was indispensable for the redemption of the world.

"Who would ever have believed," says Bourdaloue,* "that one day a creature would have to give, in some measure, being to its Creator, and that the Creator could become, in some way, the work and product of His creature? Who could ever have believed that Mary would have to give to a God that which He had not before, and that a God would have to receive an entirely new life? Who could have believed that the Word, by whom all things were made, would Himself have to be conceived by a Virgin, and that thereby the Virgin would repay, as it were, the debt of the blessing of her creation?"

* 2^e Sermon sur l'Annonciation.

To the Holy Ghost she offers the primary matter out of which He will form in her virgin womb, as in some radiant and pure tabernacle, the sacred body to be worn by the very Son of God, and she effectively co-operates in the formation of this unique and incomparable masterpiece.

The divine motherhood is then in itself an incomprehensible glory. But from it must flow, and do flow, as far as Mary is concerned, all sorts of other privileges and incomparable dignities.

In order to make her worthy of her sublime functions, the whole of the Blessed Trinity co-operated in preparing her before she was born, in sanctifying her during life, and in glorifying her in eternity, setting her from every point of view far above all other creatures.

Later on, we shall see how supereminent were her sanctity and other virtues, and how great are her glory and power and queenliness in heaven. Here it is enough to say that she was announced from the beginning of the world to our first parents as the one who was to crush the serpent's head in and through her Son, and that she appears everywhere in the Old Testament figures and prophecies at the Saviour's side.

The Fathers and Doctors took pleasure in showing how, in the Old Testament, all fore-

shows or is a symbol of the Christ. But everywhere beside the figure of Christ they recognize that of Mary His Mother.

According to them, if Jesus is the new Adam of a new world, Mary is the second Eve, the mother of regenerated humanity. If Jesus is the true Noe who is to people the world with a spiritual race, she is the ark saved from the flood, whence He will come forth. If Christ is the manna, Mary is the golden vessel in which it is contained; if He is the burning coal from which the perfume of the purest incense rises up to God, she is the censer in which He began to take fire. The virgin soil of Paradise, where grows the tree of life, the bush burning with divine fire without being consumed, the fleece dripping and drenched with heavenly dew, the house of God filled with His glory, the sealed fountain whence flows a stream of living water for the regeneration of the world, the prophetic mountain from which is quarried without human hands the stone that is to smite the colossal statue which symbolizes the empires of the earth, such are among the figures to be found in the Fathers when they write of Mary.

In the same way they tell us that the great deliverers of the people of Israel, Deborah and Judith and Esther, symbolize and foretell Mary, the great deliverer of the human race.

Like her Son, foretold by types and figures, she takes her place at His side in the writings of the prophets. "God shows her to our first parents when, overwhelmed with misfortune, they sought for some ground for hope. It was upon this second Eve and her blessed fruit that the serpent concentrated all his hate, and it is she who was to crush his head: *et ipsa conteret caput tuum*. At first she is wrapped about with the shadows of time, but by degrees the light reveals her. David catches a glimpse of her beauty, and with prophetic voice, readier than the pen of a rapid writer, he hails along with the triumph and the fascination of the King of kings, the majesty of the Queen who is sitting at His side. 'Hearken, O daughter of the Most High,' he exclaims, 'hearken, and forget thy people and thy father's house: the king doth covet thy beauty; this king is thy God, and Him shall all the world adore. As for thee, thou shalt see the daughters of Tyre bring thee gifts, and mighty nations shall come and bow down before thy face.' In the manifold vision wherein he beholds together the mystical brides of the Word and of the Holy Ghost, Solomon sings in honour alike of the Saviour's humanity and of the Church and of the sanctified soul, and of Mary the most lovely of women, the dawn of redemption, the radiant morning star receiving before all

others the kisses of the eternal sun, the dove, the well-beloved. Still nearer to the fulness of the times, Isaias and Jeremiàs, after contemplating the source of all the greatness of Mary, that is to say, her divine motherhood, proclaim to the world the great sign of mercy, the new and unique marvel of the omnipotence of Jehovah, the Virgin who is to conceive and bring forth Emmanuel, *the woman par excellence* who, alone and without any other assistance than the virtue of the Most High, is to be the mother of the man whom the world is expecting. And, then, mysterious rumours begin to spread amongst the nations: the name of a woman begins to pervade the widely diffused tradition of the Redeemer, the name of a Virgin who is to conceive receives the homage of our ancient druids; and the harmonious songs of the poets bid the Holy Child, in whom the world's hopes are set, to recognize His mother with a smile."*

Mary is foretold to the world. It is the will of God that even before she is born the universe shall catch a glimpse of her greatness, and of the privileges and glories that belong to her divine motherhood.

II.

But while she is the Mother of God, Mary has ever remained a Virgin. This is also a

* Monsabré: *Carême*, 1877, 30^e conférence.

dogma of the faith on which it is necessary to insist on account of the violent attacks made upon it by unbelievers.

Mary conceived her Son by the operation of the Holy Ghost; she knew no man and brought Him forth miraculously. Jesus left her virgin womb just as after His resurrection He left the Cenacle when the doors were shut, like some pure ray of sunshine passing through a piece of crystal without breaking it.

But let it be well noted that this is not at all the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, as many of our religious opponents suppose. That doctrine and its proofs we shall study later on. While the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception affirms that Mary was exempt from all trace of original sin, that is to say, that she received sanctifying grace, the supernatural life, at the same time as she received her natural life, from the moment of her conception in the womb of St. Anne, the dogma of her virginity affirms that she conceived and brought forth Jesus Christ apart from all ordinary laws of nature, and that she ever remained a virgin afterwards. And further, while the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined as recently as 1854, the dogma of the virginity of Mary has been of the faith since the beginning of the Church.

Every form of the Creed, which is the

summary of our beliefs, has these words: "Born of the *Virgin Mary*." The Creeds of the Apostles, of Nicæa, of Constantinople, of Ephesus, of Chalcedon, all declare the virginity of Mary. And the same fact is as clearly proclaimed in the word of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New.

Seven centuries beforehand God made this annunciation by the voice of Isaias:* "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son: and his name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to refuse the evil, and to choose the good." There have certainly been many discussions as to the meaning of the Hebrew word "*Alma*, virgin." But St. Matthew's comment after relating the message of the Angel announcing the conception of the Christ by a virgin, shows that God meant in this passage to announce the virginity of Mary. "Now all this was done," he says, "that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Behold, *a virgin shall be with child*, and bring forth a son; and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."†

Moreover, the Evangelist is sufficiently explicit of himself. It is impossible to affirm the virgin birth more clearly than it has been done by St. Matthew and St. Luke.

* Isa. vii. 14, 15.

† Matt. i. 22, 23.

"*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,*" says the Angel in St. Luke's account, "and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."* "Now the generation of Christ was on this wise," writes St. Matthew, "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, *before they came together, she was found with child, of the Holy Ghost.*"†

Mary is not only a virgin when she receives the message, but the first of women to consecrate her virginity to God by an absolute promise, indeed we may well say by a definite *vow*. This is plainly what is meant by the reply she made to the Angel: "How shall this be done, *because I know not man?*" when he had made the annunciation to her: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus."‡ If Mary had not made a vow of perpetual chastity her question would have been absurd and pointless, for her marriage with Joseph would have solved the difficulty in the most natural way. And therefore the Blessed Virgin, in spite of her betrothal, declares that she neither has had, nor will have, any intercourse with any man.

The above texts directly prove the virgin-birth of our Saviour. But St. Matthew's definite allusion to the text quoted from Isaias goes still farther, for the prophet

* Luke i. 35. † Matt. i. 8. ‡ Luke i. 31, 34.

declares that it is a virgin who conceives, and a virgin who brings forth, and hence the Evangelist applies the prophecy to the birth as well as to the conception of the Son of God.

As for thinking that after conceiving and bringing forth the Word incarnate miraculously Mary might have abandoned her watch over her virginity, the idea is as contrary to all likelihood and good sense as it is to the faith. Her virgin motherhood had hallowed Mary both for time and for eternity. She in whose womb the Word was made flesh was henceforward a holy ark whereon no one might dare to lay a profane hand.

Further, when some of the early heretics such as Carpocrates, Cerinthus, and the Ebionites, desired to attack the perpetual virginity of our Blessed Lady, the Church unanimously condemned them. "Thou hast profaned the sanctuary of the Holy Ghost," said Saint Jerome* to Helvidius. "Who ever dares to utter the name of Mary without adding to it the title of Virgin," writes St. Epiphanius.† "In their perversity," declares the Council of Milan under the presidency of St. Ambrose,‡ "Jovinian's followers say: She conceived as a virgin, but not as a virgin did she bring forth. . . .

* *Adversus Helvid.*, Nos. 13 and 15.

† *Hæres.*, 78, No. 6.

‡ *Inter epist. S. Ambrosii*, ep. 42.

If they believe not the teaching of the Bishops, let them believe the oracles of Christ, and the testimony of Angels . . . let them believe the Symbol of the Apostles, which the Roman Church hath kept, and will ever keep unspotted."

Lastly, in 649 the Lateran Council, under Pope Martin I, pronounced this solemn condemnation:* "If any one acknowledge not really and truly according to the teaching of the Fathers that the holy Mother of God and ever spotless virgin Mary specially and truly conceived of the Holy Ghost, and without any aid of man, in the end of the ages God the Word, and that she brought Him forth without the least taint of her virginity before His birth, let him be anathema."

Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the bringing forth of Jesus; this has ever been the Catholic doctrine.

It would be both impious and absurd to say that the oblation made in the temple by the Blessed Virgin Mary on the day of her Purification proves her need of purification, and that even her Son was affected by the defilement of His mother. The act of obedience and humility she then performed did not presuppose any need of purification by her any more than the baptism required and received by Jesus presupposed any need

* Canon 3.

of penance for personal sins committed by Him.

But, say the unbelievers, since according to the Gospel Christ had brothers and sisters, how can it be maintained that Mary was ever a virgin ?

Certainly this inference would be a logical one if in biblical terminology the words "brother and sister" could only be applied to those who were children of the same parents. But this is by no means the case. In the East, the word "brother" is used in a much wider sense than amongst ourselves. It often denotes cousins, or even far more distant relations. Thus the Bible calls Lot the brother of Abraham, though he was only a nephew. Laban, Jacob's uncle, calls the latter his brother. And the Gospels themselves allow us to trace back the birth of those who are called the brothers of Jesus, not to His own mother, but to one of her sisters, or to a near relation, Mary Cleophas. Amongst the brothers of Jesus the Gospel names James and Joseph. But this James and this Joseph are mentioned at the time of the crucifixion, and then they are called the sons of Mary Cleophas, the sister (or a relation) of the Blessed Virgin. So that they are, at most, only the cousins of Jesus.

Furthermore, if Jesus had brothers and sisters in the strict sense of the words, it would be impossible to explain the word of

the cross addressed to St. John: "Son, behold thy mother." One cannot imagine that if He had brothers and sisters, He would entrust His mother to a stranger; and that if His mother had sons and daughters of her own, she would set up an adoptive family, unless we assume that the children of the most perfect among women, the brothers and sisters of the Son of God, were heartless wretches, and such an idea would be monstrous.

Granted, say the unbelievers. Nevertheless does not St. Luke himself tell us that Jesus was the "first-born" son of Mary? If, then, He is the "first-born," He cannot be the only son.

This objection, too, comes of an utter ignorance of the Hebrew tongue and of the Jewish law. The word "first-born" amongst the Jews did not correspond with our notion of the same term. It was the designation given to every male child that was the first to make a woman of Israel a mother. It applied to the special duties and manifold prerogatives conferred upon her by the law, whether her child had or had not any brothers or sisters afterwards.

Moreover, when the Gospel tells us of St. Joseph that "he knew not Mary until she had brought forth her first-born son," the word "until" does not imply that he knew her subsequently, or that he then

entered into conjugal relations with her. When the Scriptures say of an occurrence that it did not take place until another event happened, it does not mean to affirm that the occurrence was followed by that other event. Thus, in Genesis we read that the raven flew away from the Ark, and that it did not return "until the waters had dried up on the earth." This means that the raven did not return at all. And in the book of the Kings it is said that Samuel saw Saul no more "until the day of his death." That does not mean that he saw him afterwards. In the same way we can only draw one inference from St. Matthew's words—namely, that Mary was a virgin.

"It must be acknowledged that this prodigy surpassed all the laws of nature, but still there is a sense in which it was quite natural. As St. Bernard argues, if a God in order to become man had to have a mother, it was due to His dignity, and therefore in a manner necessary, that that mother should be a virgin; and if this virgin, by a most unheard-of miracle, had to become a mother without ceasing to be a virgin, it was entirely fitting, and as it were indispensable, that this son should be God."*

Let us then acknowledge that Mary remained ever a virgin. And let us acknow-

* Bourdaloue: *Sermon sur l'Annonciation*.

ledge that this most pure virgin through her dignity of being the Mother of God is immensely higher and greater than the whole of creation, that she is immediately next to God, and so near to God that God alone surpasses and is above her.

Then, at the spectacle of such greatness let us gather up all the admiration and respect we are capable of, and cast it at the foot of Mary's throne, saying to her with the Angel: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou amongst women."

CHAPTER X

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND THE HOLINESS OF MARY

WE have seen Mary's incomparable greatness in becoming the Mother of God. And now, in order to understand the worship due to the Blessed Virgin, let us consider her sublime perfection.

!We shall show how full of grace Mary was from the moment she came into existence, owing to the remarkable privilege of her Immaculate Conception. Next, we shall see how all her life long she was the holiest of creatures, attaining to heights of sanctity and virtue such as God alone can conceive, and such as set her far above the most perfect of the Angels.

I.

“When God,” says St. Thomas Aquinas,* “selects one of His creatures for a special purpose, He fits and prepares it beforehand for the worthy discharge of the ministry to which He assigns it.”

* *Summa theol.*, Part III, q. 27, a. 4.

God would have run counter to the most inviolable laws of His providence if, when He was about to make Mary His mother and thereby to associate her with Himself in His great work of redeeming the world, He had not inundated her with all the gifts demanded by so high a dignity, which in the order of salvation comes next to that of our Saviour Himself.

Even a man, when he has to choose another man to fulfil an office, first of all must ascertain whether the individual is worthy and capable of carrying it out; his choice presupposes merit, and does not confer it. But God who is omnipotent does not act thus. If He chooses anyone for an office of honour, He makes him fit for its fulfilment. This may be seen in the order of nature. With what providential solicitude has He endowed each of the creatures that constitute it, giving each of them the faculties and instincts proper to the discharge of its function. And can we suppose that He would be less generous, and we may even say less wise, in the supernatural order of grace?

When we see the blessings showered upon the Patriarchs chosen to be the forefathers of the Messias, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest, we may well ask ourselves, What benedictions must have been bestowed upon her who was the Mother of the Messias?

When we see an Archangel purifying the

lips of the Prophet who had to announce the virgin motherhood of Mary; when we see the Lord Himself in the womb of His Mother sanctifying another Seer, John the Baptist, to make him worthy to celebrate His high destiny; we ask ourselves what must be the light and grace and sanctity poured out by the divine munificence upon her whom God has prepared from all eternity to be blessed and praised as the Mother of His own Son.

“ Every association rests upon a certain equality of the members of which it is made. Can this principle, which is binding as a law on even the commonest of associates, admit of an exception in the very centre of the Godhead? Can Perfection itself enter into an association for the most sublime of all Its works with a creature which did not possess the highest ideal of beauty which its nature was capable of reflecting?

“ If the eternal Father owes it to Himself to load with favours the creature predestined to be in a manner associated with Him in the generation of His Son, what is not that eternal Son of the Father bound to do for her who is to be His Mother in time? For it is well to remark that this Mother is not chosen at haphazard from amongst all the women living at the hour appointed for the Incarnation, but she is

elected and ordained for that sublime end from the moment that the Son of God decreed to unite Himself to man's nature, that is to say, the selection was made from all eternity. And since in this case it was proper for the Son of God not only to foresee His Mother in time, but also to create her, His tenderness and love bound Him to exhaust all the riches of His power on her behalf. What son, if it were in his power, could be so unnatural as to refuse to load with all the perfections and graces at his disposal her from whom he was to receive his life, unless he had some legitimate reason for doing so: and, in this case, what reason could be assigned for such a refusal? One can understand that the Son of God, in His desire to be born poor and lowly for our redemption, might have abstained from giving His Mother either glory or riches or impassibility; but since this Son was Himself to be Perfection and Sanctity and Grace, He could not deny to her who was to de His Mother all these divine gifts in the highest degree; for between Mother and Son they form features of a family likeness possessing ineffable beauty and unparalleled distinction.

“The Holy Ghost, too, was bound to lavish His favours on her who was to be unto Him the mysterious sanctuary of His noblest work, and to provide her with the first and

most supremely pure substance for the making of a unique and divine masterpiece.”*

These incomparable and divine graces were poured out upon Mary from the first moment of her existence.

“Since God had to make a Mother for Himself,” says Bossuet, “the perfection of so great a work could neither be carried too far, nor be begun too soon: and if we could conceive how august is the dignity to which she is called, we should readily acknowledge that it is far from being too much if its preparation were to begin from the first moment of her life.”†

The first of the graces thus received by Mary was her Immaculate Conception. But in what, precisely, does this privilege consist?

Many people, as we observed in our first chapter, have quite a wrong notion of the matter. Some are persuaded that, in defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Church attributes to the Blessed Virgin in the womb of her mother St. Anne a virgin-birth similar to that of our Lord Himself, who was conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Others, and these are more numerous, confuse the Immaculate Conception with the virginity of Mary, that

* Minjard: *L'Homme-Dieu*, 3, 107-109.

† 1^{er} Sermon Sur la Nativité,

is to say, with the conception and bringing forth of our Saviour Jesus.

As a matter of fact, in no sense is the question of virginity here at stake, but merely that of an exemption from original sin and of the possession of sanctifying grace, with all the train of supernatural graces and gifts that accompany it.

The Church does not say that the laws of human generation were altered for Mary's sake, but simply that from the moment that Mary became in her mother's womb a human personality through the infusion of a soul she received that higher beauty, that divine life of grace, which we only get at the time of our baptism.

When God created our first parents, He gave to them and to their descendants, in addition to the essential qualities of human nature, a participation in His own life, and this transformed their souls, lifting them up to Himself and divinizing them. Through the most inexcusable disobedience Adam and Eve fell from this supernatural state, and we who are their children are born stripped of it. Our souls leave the hands of God with a taint of defilement, just as a gold ring, in which a precious stone was going to be set, would have a defect if the stone were taken from it. This taint which shuts us out of heaven, which makes Satan glad and the Angels sad, is the loss of the

grace which should adorn us, it is original sin. Thus, in spite of its wondrous natural qualities, in spite of the beauty of its intelligence and will, the human soul on coming into the world appears unsightly and really is so in the eyes of God, because it is without its essential adornment; it is like an artistically wrought jewel lacking the diamond for which it was meant to be a setting.

The divine goodness could not endure so sad a sight, and since God had foreseen this from all eternity He also had provided a remedy for the fault; this was Redemption, through the superabundant merits of which we were to be saved by the wiping out of original sin, that is to say, by restoring to us sanctifying grace with all the means of preserving and increasing and recovering it. But whereas in our own case this redeeming force awaits the moment of our baptism for its exercise; and whereas in the case of the Jews it awaited the rite ordained by God, circumcision if they were boys, according to a very generally received opinion, and if they were girls, for an act of faith made by the parents in the name of the child; in the case of Mary it was exercised from the first moment of her conception.

When Mary's soul was created to be united to her body the taint of Adam did not come to infect it in accordance with the general law. Grace immediately supervened and

took possession of her favoured soul, and kept it from being affected in any way. God who denied this original grace to men, condescended to indue the Blessed Virgin Mary with it.

The spiritual graces with which we are adorned when we leave the waters of baptism were shed upon the Mother of God from the moment of her conception; and her most pure soul, unlike the jewel of which we have just spoken, was enriched with the diamond of divine grace which it was intended to contain, and shone from the hour of its creation with a splendid brilliance.

In Mary there was never any supernatural destitution, never any taint, never any estrangement from God. If she too needed redemption, because she belonged like the rest of us to Adam's seed, its virtue came to her in quite another manner. Instead of repairing what is amiss, it acts as a preservative in her case; instead of raising her from the general fall of man, it keeps her from being numbered amongst the fallen; and from the outset it places her in the high ranks of the children of God. Redemption in her case is no ordinary redemption, but is of that singular and lofty kind that hinders her from becoming enchained, although all the forces of evil conspire to such an end. The merits of Redemption were applied to her not only in unspeakable abundance, but

before sin had gained any hold upon her, and before grace had received the slightest fatal injury.

Such is the true doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Thus has it been formulated and taught by the Church. There is in it nothing that runs counter to reason; but, on the contrary, if those who attack the dogma only understood its true nature, they would really find it quite consistent.

“Is it not, indeed, altogether fitting that this venerable Mother should be guarded from the least taint, since God the Father committed to her His well-beloved Son in such wise that He was actually the only and common Son of God and the Virgin? Could He possibly have allowed her to fall for a single instant under the sway of the Devil when He had created her to crush his head? Could this woman undergo the slightest defilement when the Holy Ghost, by His divine operation, made her conceive in her womb Him from whom He Himself proceeds? What! is it possible for the almighty Word to preserve His Mother from a degrading taint without having used the power to do it? His blood ransoms us as soon as its merits are applied to us in baptism; and would He not have ransomed her from the very moment of her conception, since her blood was to form His own with all its divine and redeeming attributes?

"If it were possible for us to create our own mothers, we should certainly provide ourselves with such as possessed all the perfections we could give them, and we should leave nothing undone to attain this result.

"How, then, can we imagine that Jesus Christ, who has so strongly enjoined upon us to honour our parents, would not have done thus Himself by securing for His Mother the honour most befitting the Mother of a God, that is to say, exemption from all sin? No, He could not refuse to His Mother what He had granted to others, to Adam and Eve, and to the Angels. What would the heavenly spirits have said, if they had been given as Queen a creature who had even for a moment been the slave of Satan, the enemy of God?"*

But why continue to give such considerations as these? The Church has spoken, and through her infallible word we are sure that God Himself has revealed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

On December 8, 1854, Pius IX issued this supreme decree: "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which affirms that the Blessed Virgin Mary was from the first moment of her conception preserved and totally exempted from the taint of original sin by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits

* P. Tissot, *Discours choisis*, i, 316.

of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, is a revealed truth, and that therefore it must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful. If then some (which God forbid) dare rashly to hold the contrary of this definition, let them know that they have made shipwreck of the faith, and are separated from the unity of the Church."

That the definition which binds us to believe this doctrine is recent we must admit; but that is no reason for denying its truth or its revealed character. For the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, though it has only been brought fully into the light after nineteen centuries, was always part of the deposit of revealed truth, and, in spite of some disputes and denials, it was believed by the whole Church from the beginning.

In the first ages it is clearly taught by the Fathers of the Church. "Mary is free from all taint," affirms St. Ambrose.*—"We must never utter her name in the same breath as sin," says St. Augustine.†—"She alone," writes St. Ephraem,‡ "who is the mother of life, shares with Eve, who is the mother of death, the privilege of original innocence."—"Nature," says St. John Damascene,§

* *In Psalm. xcvi. Serm. 22.*

† *De natura et gratia, cap. 36, n. 42.*

‡ *Sermo exeg. ad Genesim.*

§ *Orat. 4. de Virg. Maria.*

"stayed her work in awe, waiting till grace had wrought its consequences in Mary."— And many other passages might be quoted from the Fathers to the same effect.

Before any controversy arose about this mystery, the people of Christendom were led by a supernatural instinct to look upon the Mother of God as entirely holy and pure and sinless and undefiled, as completely and totally immaculate; and this evidently implied that she was free from original sin. They could not think otherwise of the Virgin full of grace from whom the Redeemer was to take flesh. Moreover, long before the definition of the dogma and throughout the Middle Ages the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin was celebrated, alike in the West and in the East, where it was first of all established.

Belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary was so deeply engraved in the souls of men that from the beginning neither heresy nor schism could efface it. Eastern heretics and schismatics hold it along with ourselves.

In his reply to the Holy Father before the promulgation of the dogma, the Bishop of Nicopolis reports "that he is very glad to find that the schismatics and heretics of Ethiopia are almost unanimous in professing that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived entirely free from all taint of original sin."

And the Patriarch of Babylon spoke in a similar manner of the schismatics of Chaldæa.

In the sixth century the belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary must indeed have been popular amongst the Christians of Arabia, Egypt, and Syria for the tradition to reach even the Mussulmans, since it is to be found in the very pages of the Koran. "The Angels," it says,* "said unto Mary: God hath chosen thee, and hath made thee free from all defilement, and He hath elected thee from amidst all the women in the world."

No doubt the ages of calm faith were succeeded by the period of discussions. Objections were raised which stirred and shook the beliefs of some of the Doctors, and even that of St. Thomas Aquinas himself. "But the common people, who cannot enter into these subtle discussions, and did not perceive the difficulties springing from comparing doctrines with one another and apparently contradicting each other, did not waver. If she was immaculately conceived, then Mary was never a sinner, never an enemy of God, never the slave of hell, and then she must have been holy and full of grace from the very first. How could it be doubted that the Mother of God had received from her Son so fitting and natural a gift? And then

* Garcin de Tassy, *Doctrine et devoirs de la religion mussulmane*, ch. iii, 37.

occurred a marvel which has been seen more than once in the life of the Church, as for instance in the case of the devotion to the Sacred Heart: plain folk went as it were naturally straight to the truth, while the theologians, and not only the most learned among them, but even those who were most devoted to the Queen of heaven, betray hesitation and embarrassment and disturbance of mind." *

The Church as a whole never showed any wavering. Moreover, the Council of Trent, before defining the existence and the universality of original sin, declared that it had no intention of including the Blessed Virgin Mary therein.

Before the Revolution the world-famous French Sorbonne required all its students, on receiving a doctor's degree, to take an oath that they believed and would teach the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception. And long before the definition of the dogma the feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated in many places with the Church's approbation, and many altars were dedicated to Mary under the title of her Immaculate Conception, as was the Lady-altar at Saint-Sulpice from the time of M. Olier in the seventeenth century.

Let us then say with Bossuet, to whom it is well to refer again and again in speaking

* Terrien, *La Mère de Dieu*, i, 356.

of the Blessed Virgin: "There are propositions so strange and difficult that to get them believed requires the use of every argumentative effort and of every rhetorical device. On the other hand, there are some that send a certain thrill through the soul as soon as they are heard, so that they are loved even before they are known. Such propositions need no proofs. One has but to remove the difficulties and to clear up the objections, and the mind is at once drawn to accept them of its own motion. I put amongst such propositions the one I have to maintain to-day. What Christian can help believing that the Conception of the Mother of God must have had an extraordinary privilege, that it was the will of her almighty Son to preserve her from the common loss that corrupts all our faculties, most deeply impairs our souls, and then carries death to the very springs of life? Who would not be glad to assent to *such a plausible opinion?*" And now Bossuet would say "*to this dogma laid down by the Church.*"*

II.

The Blessed Virgin was never defiled, as we have seen, by original sin. Still less, say the Doctors, did she ever commit the least sin during the whole of her life. Never did

* Beginning of First Sermon On *the Conception of the Blessed Virgin.*

a single actual sin, or even the slightest of venial shortcomings, or the very smallest imperfection, as the Church affirms,* make her less pleasing in the eyes of God.

“Mary was kept from any original defilement: how then can anyone believe, after this, that the briars and thorns, and the shameful and unwholesome growths which dishonour our souls could have sprung into being in her soul? The honour of God with whom she was to enter into such intimate relations demanded her exemption from sin, which was only voluntary so far as our first parents were concerned; could it then admit of her ever becoming guilty by an act of her own will? The spotless Angels could never acknowledge as their Queen a creature that had fallen by an inevitable law, and far less one that had become dishonoured by its own free will. And besides, where could sin come from in one whose subjugated passions submitted without a murmur to reason’s rule, and in whom grace was carefully preparing an abode for eternal Wisdom?”†

The Most Blessed Virgin, as the Doctors again tell us, received indeed from the beginning such fulness of light and supernatural grace, that not only did she not sin, but she was confirmed in grace, that is to say, she could not even sin.

* Council of Trent, Sess. vi, can. 23.

† Monsabré, *Carême*, 1877.

In her case, one of the consequences of this original innocence was perfect order in all her faculties, the absence of that concupiscence which urges us so distressingly towards evil, and the subordination of the passions and senses to the rule of reason. "Mary's mind was constantly filled with God, and her will always rooted in Him by a love that was stronger than any attraction towards created goods. Lastly, she was ever guarded by the vigilant providence of God, and by the constant superabundance of actual graces. All these outward and inward helps confirmed her in sanctifying grace in a much more complete manner than the partial confirmation granted to some of the greatest Saints.

"Furthermore, this blessed impossibility of sinning, and even of experiencing the least inclination towards evil, did not bind her by any necessity, and was far from putting any impediment in the way of her acquiring merits. She was not without trouble and sorrow. The one thing of which she was ignorant was the struggle against inward temptation. She still had to face the painful effort of accepting all sufferings that befell her; ascetical mortifications of the senses and the weariness of daily toil, not to speak of the spiritual pains which God laid upon her. As to free will, this she possessed in the same way as we do; indeed,

she had it in still larger degree, for the risk of choosing wrongly is not of the essence of freedom, but is on the contrary an imperfection in it.* Her freedom was all the greater in that no error, or ignorance, or disturbance of the passions and senses was there to darken her mental judgment; a perfect freedom that, more like the divine freedom than is ours, decided in the clearest light and in the fullest self-possession the direction in which it would be exercised."†

This negative perfection of the Most Holy Virgin is that which often strikes us most. Herein Mary is the living antithesis of our wretched selves.

But the positive side of her sanctity considered in its totality, as depending on her Immaculate Conception, is really far more wonderful. Never shall we be able to understand what fulness of grace was poured out upon her from the very outset, nor how it increased until the day of her death. Since original sin is the privation of sanctifying grace in the soul, and since Mary was free from this through her Immaculate Conception, she received grace in her soul from the very beginning. But, according to the

* Her free will as a creature, still walking in the way, was not *intrinsically* incapable of failure; but the help already referred to made any failure impossible with an entire moral impossibility.

† De la Broise, *La Sainte Vierge*, p. 58.

general opinion of the Fathers and Doctors, she received it in such abundance that its first beginnings in her equalled the final perfection in others. They tell us that the grace received by the Blessed Virgin at her Immaculate Conception surpasses all that was ever attained by the most beautiful of the Angels or the most heroic of the Saints.

Nevertheless, this first grace was capable of increase, since it was not infinite; and it was marvellously increased by innumerable meritorious acts throughout Mary's life. Doubtless Mary did not practise the extraordinary austerities of certain penitents, but so great was her ardour of charity and divine love, so united was she to God at the Incarnation and the Redemption in all her acts, that although she was full of grace from the beginning, she made more constant progress than anyone to reach a perfection of graces and merits that can be measured by God alone. "Supernatural graces indeed, far from acting as an impediment upon the capacities of the recipient, expand and lay them open to a fresh influx. The more you love God, the more you participate in His grace, and the more apt you grow to receive the effects of His goodness. Grace and charity depend upon one another; progress in the one means improvement in the other. But do we not know that loving is the best way to gain new strength to love? By

loving the heart is stirred and aroused; and the Holy Spirit who possesses it inspires it with a fresh vigour to love still more. To limit love is to show ignorance of the nature and law of loving, for the more anyone loves the more he desires and wills to love. Grace then calls for grace, for grace in its fulness, a fulness ever increasing. If you would have a comparison taken from things material, look at a river the bed of which becomes ever wider and deeper the more abundant the flow of the waters from the mountains which it laves. Thus nothing hindered grace in Mary from getting fresh increase in spite of its fulness."* And Mary, who from the moment of her birth was more lovely than the most beautiful of Angels, attained to a grace and sanctity beyond our loftiest conceptions.

And now let us endeavour to say a word as to her virtues in detail. "All these flowers of virtue," we may well say with Père Monsabré,† "bloom together, and send their fragrance up to heaven. Here is *faith* sustained by reading and meditation of the Holy Scriptures, drenched with the light of contemplation, strengthened by converse with the Angels and intimate intercourse with divine wisdom; and neither the unbelief of men, nor the veil that hides the

* Terrien, *La Mère de Dieu*, ii, 196.

† *Carême*, 1877.

majesty of God, nor the darkening of His perfection by the great offence of the cross, is able to shake or disturb it. Here is *hope* that lays hold upon the promises of God, concentrating in the most fervent of desires all the desires of mankind athirst for redemption; hope now ready to resist the trials and forsakings that assure the coming victory of man's wickedness. Here is *charity* which will cleave only to the heavenly Beloved, giving itself up to Him without reserve, and embracing all created beings to offer them to Him; charity making beforehand deep in the heart of her who is to be our Mother abysse of mercy wherein all the sinners in the world may fly for refuge. Here is *prudence* of such delicacy as to be disturbed by the coming of an Angel, and to hesitate at a glorious announcement from Heaven itself. Here is *justice* prostrate in perpetual adoration before God, obedient to all His commands, yielding to every one of His inspirations, tenderly surrendering itself to the wise leadings of His providence, ready for every duty without a moment's respite, the most faithful mirror of that eternal justice which is able to give freely to all creatures a place at the banquet of the divine goodness that invites them. Here is *strength*, magnanimous and invincible beneath its veil of weakness, strength that prepares in obscurity for the struggle with adversity,

strength which will be able when the time comes to stand at the foot of Golgotha, to endure without a murmur the wrath of God, the blows that should fall upon the sinner, and to transform a timid maiden into the queen of martyrs, the heart of the tenderest of mothers into the altar on which the first sacrifice is to be the most amiable of sons. Here is *temperance* detached from every earthly joy in order to taste nothing but the chaste delights of grace, soon to walk with glad and firm footsteps in the holy paths of poverty.

“ Around these heroic virtues, royal flowers of the most lovely of spiritual gardens, are crowded bunches of a *host of amiable virtues* to which we are indebted for the charming portrait sketched for us by the pen of St. Ambrose in his book for Virgins: ‘ Mary was humble of heart and had a prudent mind; she was grave in her talk, sober in her intercourse, modest and reserved in her slightest speech, diligent in reading the Holy Scriptures, careful in all her work, habitually referring to the judgment of God rather than to that of men, never hurting anyone, respectful towards all that was great, and especially so towards the sacred majesty of age. . . . She had no affectation in her looks, and her beautiful eyes were both modest and frank; she showed no boldness in her speech, and there was nothing un-

fitting in her actions; her demeanour, gait, and voice were all in harmony, and her body was so true an image of her beautiful soul that she appeared to be the incarnation of honour. . . . Impressive and venerable in her movements and address, she had no better guardian than herself, and after she had passed by, one sought less the traces of her virgin footsteps than the degree of virtue which she had outstripped. The practice of virtue was not so much an accomplishment which she had to fulfil as a lesson which she gave to everyone around.' ""*

"Then contemplate the Seraphim," might we say with St. Peter Damian,† "ascend high up above these lofty natures in the boldness of your flight, and you will see on a lower plane than the Virgin all the grandest of existing things; but one thing only surpasses this work of God, the Workman Himself."

Amongst all others one great lesson we draw from these thoughts: it is this, that following Mary's example we ought constantly to work to increase the treasures of grace which God has implanted in our souls, not on the day of our conception indeed, but on that of our baptism.

Assuredly to hope to attain to such sanctity

* Monsabré, *Carême*, 1877.

† *Serm.* 44, *In Nat. Virg. Deip.*

as in any way approaches that of the Most Holy Virgin would be as it were the mad ambition of a little lamp desiring to rival the sun, the brightness of which the brilliance of all the stars together cannot approach. But, to wish to become like her at all costs, to resemble her more and more every day by constant fidelity, by the ardour and depth of our aspirations for holiness, this is an imperious duty binding upon everyone. Catholics are her children, and they ought to imitate their Mother.

CHAPTER XI

THE POWER AND THE CULTUS OF MARY

AND now let us consider the place held by Mary in heaven, the rôle of mediatress and mother which is there assigned to her in our regard, and the worship we owe her.

In heaven Mary stands for the omnipotence of prayer, as we are told by the Fathers and Doctors, and to pay her due honour, to have a true devotion for her, is a pledge of predestination.

I.

As we have seen, the earthly existence of Mary began with an unheard-of prodigy of mercy, the Immaculate Conception. In the same way, her entrance into glory began with a glorious singularity, the Assumption. Mary's body did not undergo the corruption of the grave. Soon after she was laid therein the Mother of God went up to heaven both in body and soul.

"There is," says Bossuet, "a wonderful connection between the Christian mysteries, and that of Mary's Assumption is peculiarly bound up with the Incarnation of the eternal

Word. For if holy Mary first received the Saviour, it is only right that the Saviour in turn should receive Blessed Mary, and, since He did not disdain to come down to her, He had afterwards to raise her unto Himself to make her enter into His glory.’’*

Doubtless, Mary’s Assumption is not a dogma of Catholic faith. If anyone were to deny it, he would not then be a heretic; but it is impossible to cast doubt upon it without remarkable and reprehensible temerity. A great many bishops presented to the Vatican Council in 1870 a petition begging that the Assumption should be the subject of a special definition. Interrupted in its work, the Council was unable to deal with the matter, but from a theological point of view the approbation of the Greek and Latin Churches agreeing as to the fact of the Assumption guarantees our belief against any likelihood of error.

This is how Gregory of Tours† summed up the popular opinion of the sixth century on the point: “When the Blessed Virgin approached the end of her days and God took her from the world, all the Apostles gathered together from different countries in her house. They watched with her, and behold, the Lord Jesus came with His Angels, received her soul, gave it to St. Michael, and disappeared.

* First Sermon *On the Feast of the Assumption*.

† *De glor. marty. c. iv, P.L., LXXI, 708.*

At the break of day the Apostles took her body and laid it in the tomb, and kept watch by it, awaiting the Lord's return. He appeared to them again, and, casting a cloud around the body, had it borne away to Paradise, where, reunited with her soul, it partakes of eternal joys."

Many of these details, as, for instance, the presence of the Apostles at Jerusalem and the Lord's apparitions, are disputable. But we know that the Fathers were very opposed to the supposedly apostolic legends, popularized by the apocryphal gospels. If they substantially accepted the account of the Assumption and considered that it really represented the facts in spite of certain legendary details, that must be because they recognized its essential truth.

The place of honour given by the Greek as well as by the Roman liturgy to the feast of the Assumption further clearly proves that here we have to do with no unsubstantial story concocted by ignorant devotees and blindly accepted by credulity, but with a real and undeniable fact.

One would like to be able to follow Mary as she leaves this world and rises in majesty heavenwards. But her triumphant Assumption is in like case with the Lord's Ascension; a cloud enfolds her and conceals her from mortal eyes.

All that is certain is that her soul from the

moment of death, and her soul and body from the time of her Ascension in heaven, enjoy a glory and happiness far beyond those of all the Saints and Angels.

However high may be the wondrous nature of Angels which has never known what it is to be under the yoke of matter, however richly it may be supernaturally endowed by God, the Angels are only the servants of God, and Mary is His Mother. On account of her title of Mother of God, of the unparalleled supernatural treasures she has received, and of the incomparable virtues she has exercised, she is, as the Fathers tell us, set on a throne at the right hand of her Son. *Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato.* The Church in her joy on the feast of the Assumption sings, "that she is raised in heaven above the angelic choirs." In heaven she stands in a manner between the divine hierarchy and the hierarchies of the Angels and the elect.

St. John saw her in a vision, and he represents her as surrounded by all that is fullest of light and brilliancy in the world of nature. "I saw," he says, "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."* Mary's crown in heaven consists of the angelic host, the innumerable legions of the elect surrounding her whom they acknowledge as their

* Apoc. xii. 1.

Queen, the prophets now contemplating her whom their lips foretold, the Apostles lauding her who stayed with them long after Jesus' death to strengthen them and to enlighten the newborn Church, the martyrs offering the homage of their patience to the Queen of martyrs as well as to the suffering Jesus, and the spotless choirs of virgins praising her who taught them the greatness of virginity.

In heaven Mary is an all-powerful Queen. The Doctors do not shrink from calling her "suppliant omnipotence." All that God can do by nature, say they, Mary can do by grace, because the whole of the Blessed Trinity, and especially her Son, cannot deny her anything.

And it is God's will that we should fly to her. He has made her His treasurer and the dispenser of His favours. "When God," says Bousset,* "had once decided to give us Jesus Christ by the Blessed Virgin Mary, the decree was firmly established, for the gifts of God are without repentance. It is and always will be true that, once having received through her the universal principle of grace, through her too we must obtain all its various applications, whatever our calling as Christians may be."

Mary is really a mediatrix between God

* Third Sermon *On the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

and ourselves. This secondary mediation is not indispensable, for necessity can only be predicated of the mediation of Jesus Christ, but it is a normal inference from the divine motherhood of Mary, and from the sacrifice which she offered on Calvary in union with her Son.

As the Mother of Jesus, Mary fully consented to the immolation of the Victim, and at the foot of the cross on which her Son suffered and died she underwent a martyrdom of heart. A sword of sorrow then transpierced her soul. With the Passion of Jesus is associated the Com-passion of Mary, and her unique sacrifice ascended in one holocaust with His to heaven.

By itself Mary's sacrifice would have lacked all redeeming power, for the Man-God was the predestined Victim that alone could appease the divine justice. But her Son's Passion vivified and sanctified His Mother's Com-passion. Through the merits of His divine Passion Mary's sorrow acquired a value that it would never have had of itself, and Mary the Queen of martyrs in immolating herself along with Jesus co-operated with Him in the Redemption.

"Since then," writes Leo XIII, "she has contributed her ministry to the work of redeeming mankind; she likewise exercises it in the dispensing of the grace that perpetually flows from the cross, invested for this pur-

pose, as she is, with an almost immeasurable power."*

Moreover, her sole desire is to make use of this power, for her might is only equalled by her goodness. The more good she can do us, the more she wishes to do it. For she loves us beyond all that we can understand, since she is our Mother.

In being made man the divine Word became our brother, and His Father adopted us as children, and His holy Mother too became our own. By becoming the Mother of Jesus, Mary becomes the Mother of the Fountain-head of the supernatural life. And thus in another way she becomes our Mother, since we owe her the supernatural life which was lost by sin.

But it is above all at Calvary that her Maternity in relation to ourselves is brought out. In the ardent desire which impels Him to make us all as well as Himself the children of His Mother, Jesus puts us in His stead by an official act and a last will, signed with His blood: "Woman, behold thy son," says He to Mary, showing her St. John, and indicating by him all mankind, as the Church asserts. These words are as it were a second Annunciation, affirming a new motherhood for Mary, a maternity of mankind, creating in Mary a mother's heart for every one of us.

* The encyclical *Adjutricem populi*, September 5, 1895.

Let us consider it well: Mary now definitively becomes our Mother. Jesus is as it were reproduced in each one of us in order to claim her love as a child claims its mother's love. And therefore we can say to her what no Angel has any right to say: Thou art not only our Queen, but thou art also our Mother.

From that moment Mary had the same feeling towards us as if we were really the fruit of her womb. She loves us more than the tenderest of mothers ever loved her darling child, because her love is composed of divine charity far more than of human tenderness, and because she sees that we are bought with the precious blood of her divine Son.

Furthermore, the Church bids us hope in Mary's prayers every moment of our lives and at the hour of our death. "Holy Mary, Mother of God," she makes us say incessantly, "pray for us now and at the hour of our death."—"Gate of Heaven, Star of the sea, Health of the sick, Consolation of the afflicted, Refuge of sinners, *Pray for us.*"

The Councils specially attribute to her the ministry of mercy and reconciliation. "By thee and by thy prayers," cries out that of Ephesus, "idolaters are converted, heresies are dying out, and the Church grows and prospers in all the world. By thee our Saviour's cross is lifted up in all the earth,

heaven triumphs, the Angels rejoice, devils are driven away, the tempter is overcome, and the guilty are raised up to heaven."

Mary is a Mother as well as a Queen, and she is full of mercy and goodness. This is unanimously proclaimed by all Catholic peoples, who have given her the most sweet and glorious titles. There is *Our Lady of Mercy* for all who weep, *Our Lady of Perpetual Succour* for all who invoke her, *Our Lady of Ransom* for captives, *Our Lady of Good Counsel* for those in need of guidance, *Our Lady Help of Christians* for all who need her help.

"Let him say nought about thy goodness," says St. Bernard, "who can remember having invoked thee in his needs, and having been left in the lurch by thee. . . . Never hath it been told of any of those who have had recourse to thy protection, implored thy help, and begged for thy prayers that they have been forsaken." For more than eight centuries have these words been upon the lips of multitudes, and yet never have they been proved false.

Innumerable are the miracles wrought in the past and still being done to-day by Mary, especially in those places to which pilgrimages are often made. How often has she healed the sick, tempered the lot of the unfortunate, set prisoners free, saved the shipwrecked from drowning, converted hard-

ened sinners whose recovery was despaired of, and overwhelmed with the rarest favours the devout and fervent who have loved her as if they were her own children.

As she herself declared at La Salette, she intercedes unceasingly, and stays the uplifted arm of her divine Son when about to smite poor sinners in His wrath; and when justice cannot be denied a penalty she still does her utmost to abate its severity. On earth she protects her devout clients and those on whose behalf she is invoked; she even succours them amidst the flames of purgatory, comforting them amidst their sufferings, and curtailing the time of their expiation.

II.

With what eagerness and with what confidence should we then fly to Mary, and supplicate and invoke her !

Seeing that it is of faith, since the Church has defined it, that the worship and invocation of Saints are profitable to our salvation, yet it is not enough, as the great Doctors of the Church bear witness, to speak of the worship of Mary as profitable, nor even as very profitable. St. Alphonsus teaches that the worship of Mary is morally necessary to salvation, that is to say that salvation is not indeed absolutely impossible without having recourse to her, but that it is at least

very difficult. And it is in this sense that the following words of Blessed Grignon de Montfort must be understood: "We must not confuse the devotion to the Blessed Virgin with our devotions to the other Saints, as if it were not necessary, and as if it were of supererogation. The learned and devout Suarez of the Society of Jesus, the pious scholar Juste Lipse, a doctor of Louvain, and many others, following the opinions of the Fathers, and amongst others of St. Augustine, of St. Ephraem the deacon of Edessa, of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, of St. Germanus of Constantinople, of St. John of Damascus, of St. Anselm, of St. Bernard, of St. Bernardine, of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, have proved indisputably that devotion to the Most Holy Virgin is necessary to salvation, and that it is a mark of reprobation, as was acknowledged by Ecolampadius and some other heretics, not to love and esteem the Blessed Virgin, and that it is, on the contrary, an infallible mark of predestination to be wholly and truly devoted or devout to her."

In the same treatise of *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* this Blessed Servant of Mary further explains the latter proposition: that true devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a sign of predestination to heavenly happiness. "The opinions and the examples of the Saints confirm this, reason and experi-

ence teach it and prove it. Of all the quotations of the holy Fathers and Doctors, of which I have made an ample collection, I only cite one so as not to be too lengthy: 'To be devout to thee, O Blessed Virgin,' writes St. John Damascene, 'is a weapon of salvation given by God to those whom He wills to save.' "

In accord with Blessed Grignon de Montfort all the Saints and Doctors affirm that a true servant of Mary cannot perish. But the Blessed missionary continues: "If devotion to Mary is necessary for all to gain their salvation easily, it is far more so for those who are called to special perfection; and I believe that no one can acquire an intimate union with our Lord and perfect fidelity to the Holy Ghost without the closest union with the Blessed Virgin and the greatest dependence on her assistance."

Whatever, then, be our spiritual state, whether we be fervent or lukewarm, just or sinners, we may and we ought to invoke Mary. We may and we ought to do it for our spiritual needs above all; we may do it with confidence, even in our temporal and other necessities.

The mental or vocal prayers we use will plainly depend upon the circumstances and the devotion of each individual, but the most ancient and venerable of all is the *Hail Mary*. So deeply embedded is it in

Christian practice that it is only neglected by those who have given up praying.

One must, however, be well on one's guard not to be amongst those whom Père de Montfort calls *self-interested devotees*, who only have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary or think of her when they want to obtain some favour.

It is not enough to pray to her, she must be respected and honoured as is her due on account of her matchless greatness. God Himself invites us to do this by the example He has given us in assigning her a place in heaven above Saints and Angels. Of course we do not adore her, and Protestants are quite mistaken in bringing such an accusation against us. The little Catholic child learns in his catechism that to pay to any creature the supreme honour which is due to God alone is to commit an act of idolatry. God alone can claim the supreme worship of adoration theologically termed *Latria*. In God alone must we acknowledge the First Cause, the Creator, the Lord of all. Since Mary is a creature she must only be honoured with the worship called *Dulia* (from *doulos*, a slave), that is to say, with such worship as is due to the servants of God. It is from God that Mary, like the Saints and Angels, has received everything. But because she has received more than all the Saints and Angels, because she is in-

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comparably above them through her title of Mother of God, through her merits and heavenly glory, she has a right to a worship beyond any that we pay to them, and the Church calls this worship *Hyperdulia*—i.e., a worship above that of *Dulia*.

By the fact of praying to Mary we honour her. But the devout celebration of her feasts, being enrolled in her guilds or confraternities, giving her statue or picture a place of honour in our homes, wearing her medals or scapulars,* such are the ordinary

* The word "scapular" comes from *scapula*, shoulder. It is the strip of cloth representing that part of the religious habit, covering the shoulders and falling over the chest and back, which is the distinctive garment of certain religious Orders, such as the Carmelites or Dominicans. Thus the scapular indicates the Order with which the wearer is associated.

The chief scapulars are: 1. *Brown*, of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, revealed in 1251 to St. Simon Stock at Cambridge, with a promise that our Lady would save those who wore it until death from suffering eternally. No obligatory prayer is attached to it. It is, however, a pious belief that its wearers, if they keep the chastity proper to their state of life, and recite the Little Office daily, will be set free from Purgatory by the Blessed Virgin on the Saturday after their Death. The recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary may be commuted for another prayer by him who gives the scapular. 2. *Blue*, of the Immaculate Conception, revealed to Blessed Ursula Benincasa early in the seventeenth century. The wearers are pledged to honour the Immaculate Conception and to pray

means strongly recommended by the Church for honouring her in a fitting manner, and for obtaining the favours which she is willing and able to dispense without measure to all, but more especially to those who honour and invoke her.

Nevertheless there is here a danger to be avoided. Because they wear a scapular and daily recite an *Ave* or a *Memorare*, the *presumptuous* sometimes do not shrink from sin, and yet think they are sure to be saved, seeing that, as they say, the Blessed Virgin

for the conversion of those living in vice, no special prayer for the purpose being prescribed. A singular privilege of the wearers, if they recite six *Paters* and *Aves* and *Glorias* with the proper dispositions in honour of the Blessed Trinity and of the Immaculate Conception, is that they may gain the Plenary indulgences of the Stations of Rome, Jerusalem, St. James of Compostella, and of the Portiuncula, as well as a quantity of partial indulgences. 3. *White*, of the Holy Trinity (Trinitarians). 4. *Black*, of the Seven Dolours (Servites). 5. *Red*, of the Passion.

Pius X by a decree of December 16, 1910, allowed all the scapulars to be replaced by a single medal, without losing any of the privileges or indulgences belonging to the various scapulars. This medal must have on one side a representation of our Lady, and on the other of our Lord showing His Sacred Heart. It may be blessed by any priest who has the right of investing anyone with the scapular, but the person must have been first invested with the scapular or scapulars in question, unless he is a soldier.

has promised to guard from hell those who honour her in that particular way.

Clearly the Blessed Virgin cannot favour vice. She could not promise to save us in our own despite. She could not promise to reward a purely outward devotion. *Dominus autem intuetur cor.* If anyone says: "I need not worry, I can sin, and I am sure of salvation because I have invoked Mary and wear her scapular," he wrongs Mary because he wrongs her divine Son, and this would be making a monstrous mistake. Mary's promises are meant for persons of good will, not for others. But if anyone honestly does his best, however great his frailty and wretchedness may be, if he is truly devout to Mary, then he may be full of hope, for the Saints assure us: "No faithful servant of Mary can be lost."

In view of all these considerations no wonder that the worship of Mary is held in honour in the Church.

And let no one say in common with certain modern writers that it is an innovation which was unknown in the earlier ages of Christianity. We may and must, indeed, admit that in the first three centuries devotion to Mary had not reached its fullest height. Apparently Mary did not then take, as she does now, a definite place in the liturgy with her own special feasts and processions and prayers made to honour her.

At any rate there is no clear evidence of it. The list of feasts of our Lady only begins to develop after the fifth century. "Anyone," writes the celebrated theologian Thomassin, "may well be surprised at the lateness of the dates we assign to the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, but we could only put forward what was to be found on the subject in the ecclesiastical records."

It may have been part of the divine plan that before all other worship the most essential of all, that of our divine Redeemer, should be the first to take deep and firm root. Besides, is it not plain that in the primitive Church "a certain charitable prudence, with a real care for the best interests of a vast number of souls, had to clear from their path every stumbling-block, and thus as it were to put a damper on the enthusiasm of devotion to Mary?

"The inveterate tendency of the Greek and Latin peoples to polytheism is well known, as is the place given in their mythologies to the goddesses who were the mothers of other gods, the part played particularly by the 'Good Goddess' at Rome in state affairs, and the honours which were decreed to her by public authority. Would it not have been walking on burning coals to exalt the grandeurs and beauties of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when minds were so disordered? What dangers were to be dreaded

and avoided ! In attracting and fixing people's attention upon the incomparable beauty of the Blessed Virgin, the Church would surely have aroused amongst these idolatrous nations a concert of bitter mockeries and infamous calumnies, for they would not have failed to cry out upon the enthronization of a new idol in their pantheon, and to denounce the perfidious hand of the Church for doing this after having cast down the old national divinities to set up on their débris a divinity of foreign extraction. Face to face with the nations who had only just escaped from the night of paganism and as yet but insecurely established in the faith, the Church could not help fearing that the too popular celebration of Mary might make them run the risk of wandering away from the Person of the Son by becoming too excessively attached to His Mother."*

But if, indeed, we cannot prove by chapter and verse that from the very beginning the devotional practices concerning Mary, such as prayers, feasts, etc., were as common as they are now, the doctrine that underlies the worship becomes clearer and clearer at every step.

In the Acts of the Apostles when the sacred historian is narrating the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost upon

* Godet, *Revue du clergé français*, 15 mai, 1911, pp. 448, 449.

the newly born Church, he specially names the Virgin Mary as present in the Cenacle to distinguish her from the other women who were there, and thereby testifies to the respect in which her name was held, as being the greatest after that of the Saviour of the world, amongst the earliest believers.

This respect and veneration for Mary we find once more in the depths of the Catacombs, where the first Christians hid during life and where they buried their brethren. There are to be seen numbers of pictures of the Blessed Virgin, either alone or with the divine Child in her arms, or between St. Peter and St. Paul, or between two doves, and all this shows the respect in which the Virgin Mary was held.

Then there are the hymns of praise and love devoted to her by the earliest Fathers in their writings before the Councils of Nice and of Ephesus. One need only cite what St. Gregory Nazianzen relates in his panegyric on St. Justina,* that this generous martyr invoked Mary, crying out: "O Virgin, help a virgin in danger!" This prayer, which the eloquent Doctor puts into the mouth of St. Justina on the verge of her martyrdom, was in common use during the era of persecution.

The Council of Ephesus in 431 by its solemn definition of the divine motherhood

* *Or.*, t. XVIII., n. 19.

of Mary gave a vigorous impulse to the worship of our Lady.

In the Middle Ages the towers of cathedrals rose in honour of Mary, winged words of hymns were composed for her, and an imposing harmony of witnesses, amidst whom may be counted St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, to whose testimony we will venture to add that of Dante, united in celebrating the Mother of God. The Dominicans with the Rosary won multitudes to the devotion to Mary. The sons of St. Francis of Assisi, with bare feet and hearts aflame, became champions of the belief in the Immaculate Conception. In opposition to Protestantism, which rebelled against the ample homage paid to Mary, the Council of Trent affirmed the inviolable purity of her whole life, and took care not to include her in the decree which declared that all the children of Adam had incurred the taint of original sin. The Society of Jesus, led by St. Ignatius to war upon heresy, placed under Mary's protection the labours of its theologians, the conquering advance of its missionaries, and the heroism of its martyrs. And lastly, to say a word about St. Sulpice, it is well known that M. Olier, the venerable reformer of the parish and the founder of the famous seminary, constantly recommended the devotion to the Blessed Virgin; it was her monogram that he

chose to be that of Saint-Sulpice; he decided to begin his church with building the Lady-chapel, and invoked the Blessed Virgin Mary's name unceasingly.

And now let us cast a glance round the world as it is to-day. What a number of splendid sanctuaries the piety of peoples has raised to Mary on all sides! How many masterpieces have the arts achieved in her honour! There is hardly a great painter or sculptor who has not endeavoured to reproduce her virgin beauty. In every church there is a Lady-altar which is hers by right. Many of our fanes are the centre of pilgrimages from every quarter of the globe. Lyons sees the pilgrims ascending the Fourvière hill; they make their way through the mountain-gorges of Quercy to pay their homage to our Lady of Rocamadour; the Pyrenees are proud of giving shelter to our Lady of Lourdes; Normandy has honour paid to the Blessed Virgin of la Déliverande; Marseilles has Notre-Dame la Garde to keep watch over the waves of the Mediterranean and be the sailors' hope; in Switzerland they honour our Lady of the Hermits; in Italy, our Lady of Loretto; and in Paris, our Lady of Victories.

Mary's feasts, like those of our Lord, follow one another uninterruptedly throughout the liturgical year. Two whole months,

the months of May and October, are specially devoted to her.

In the family, Mary's name is the first to be taught by the mother after that of Jesus. It is the one most frequently given at the font. On Mary the Christian mother fastens her gaze, and by her she rules her own life. Everywhere her gracious image is to be seen, nor is it uncommon in the home for even those mouths that have uttered curses in the daytime, nevertheless when evening falls to address to Mary some prayer which was learnt at a mother's knee.

Here is a wonderful thing! We have various leanings towards different Saints; one loves the austerity of St. Francis of Assisi, another the gentleness of St. Francis of Sales; but there is only the worship of Mary that seems equally dear to all. So well does it harmonize with human nature that it is as much a man's devotion as a woman's, as much a child's as that of the aged, as much a farmer's as a soldier's, as much the rich man's as the poor man's, as much the scholar's as that of the unlearned, as much that of the innocent as of the penitent. Must this not be because God has made Mary our Mother and put into our hearts at Baptism an attraction towards her like that which we feel from our birth for her to whom we owe our lives?

Let us then be filled with a true devotion for Mary. Let us glorify and love her, and not allow a day to pass by without invoking her. If we are among the just, she will help us to remain among them always. If we are sinners, she will help us to return to God. She will be the guardian of our lives, and at the hour of death she will be at our bedside to sustain us in the last of all struggles, to close our dying eyes, and to open for us the gates of heaven.

CHAPTER XII

THE ROSARY

AMONGST all the devotional practices connected with the Blessed Virgin Mary there is one entitled to our special consideration by its importance and by the attacks that have been made upon it : this is the Rosary.

Its recitation has been and is still recommended to Christians in every possible way. We shall show how, in spite of its apparent monotony, it is a supremely beautiful form of prayer, offering the greatest advantages to those who practise it.

I.

The French word *chapelet*, used to denote a rosary of five mysteries, comes from the old French *chapel* signifying " a crown." Hence it stands for the little crown (*chapel*) which was put, and is still placed, upon the head of any statue of our Lady. The whole of the *Paters* and *Aves* which make it up form as it were a spiritual crown of prayers presented to our Lady, and hence it is called a *chapelet*.

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For a similar reason the word *Rosary*, meaning a crown of spiritual roses, is applied to the recitation of three chaplets, and in England, even to the recitation of a single one, a set of five mysteries.

Many believe that the institution of the Rosary goes back to St. Dominic in the thirteenth century. As a matter of fact, it is far older.

The use of grains or beads for counting the prayers was known to the anchorites of the earliest ages of the Church, and it is so natural that we can hardly be surprised to find it amongst Mussulmans, Buddhists, and others. Long before the time of St. Dominic lay-brothers in monasteries were accustomed, instead of reciting the hundred and fifty Psalms of the Psalter in the same way as the clergy, to repeat the hundred and fifty *Aves* of the Rosary, which they called Mary's Psalter; and to reckon them they made use of beads strung on a small cord.

Hence the recitation of the hundred and fifty *Aves* of the Rosary goes back to an earlier date than St. Dominic. The meditation on the fifteen mysteries is, however, more modern in origin; it was only begun about the middle of the fifteenth century by the Dominican Alain de la Roche.*

Nevertheless, it is a pious belief that the

* *Revue pratique d'Apologétique*, October 1, 1909.

Blessed Virgin herself revealed to St. Dominic the preaching and the recitation of the Rosary as one of the most effective means for the conversion of the heretics of his day, the Albigenses. Thus we should put back the great impulse given to the devotion of the Rosary since the time of St. Dominic to an express recommendation of Mary herself.

Nor is this to be wondered at. Did not the Blessed Virgin condescend fifty years ago to appear at Lourdes with a rosary in her hands, and did she not recite the *Gloria* at the end of each decade along with Bernadette?

However this may be, certain it is that for many centuries the Church has strongly recommended the faithful to recite the Rosary. "Our predecessors," writes Leo XIII,* "took pleasure in loading it with their praises, and in enriching it with the most valuable privileges. Urban IV testifies that the recitation of the Rosary procures daily great benefits for the faithful; Sixtus IV declares that this prayer specially honours God and the Virgin Mary, and wards off from the world the evils that threaten it; Leo X reminds us that it was instituted against heresiarchs and new-born heresies; and Julius II sees in the Rosary the glory of the Roman Church. St. Pius V

* The encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus*.

teaches that owing to the diffusion of this form of prayer the faithful, aroused by the meditations and kindled by the prayers, became almost changed men, the darkness of heresy was driven away, and the torch of the Catholic faith shone with a new brilliancy."

In thanksgiving for the victory of Lepanto over the Turks on October 7, 1571, while the confraternities of the Rosary were lifting up their hands in prayer to Mary, this St. Pius V founded the feast of the holy Rosary at Rome. In 1573 Gregory XIII authorized the keeping of the feast not only in Rome, but in every church where there was an altar of our Lady of the Rosary. Clement X extended the grant to the whole of Spain. A fresh victory over the Turks on August 5, 1716, won by Prince Eugene at Peterwardein under the Emperor Charles VI, led Clement XII to extend the feast to the whole Church.

In 1868 Pius IX, at the request of Father Moran, O.P., authorized for Spain during the month of October a pious exercise in honour of our Lady of the Rosary, and enriched it with the same indulgences as Mary's month. But above all it was Leo XIII who gave the devotion of the Rosary its full development. He raised the feast to be one of the second class, had an office drawn up for it which is a marvel of fitness, grace, and piety,

inserted at the end of the Litany of our Lady an invocation to the "Queen of the Most Holy Rosary," and prescribed the recitation of this Litany during the whole of the month of October.

Thus the Church by the voice of her Sovereign Pontiffs has long been calling, and still strongly urges her children to the devotion of the Rosary.

Moreover, one could not find a single fervent community in which the daily recitation of the Rosary is not an obligatory exercise. In many dioceses it is recited in public not only during the month of the Rosary, but every Sunday before or after Vespers. Most priests consider it a duty to recite it daily as well as their breviary. As for the faithful who also daily recite it, or at least a decade, they are innumerable, and their number is constantly on the increase.

This pious practice prevails not only amongst women and girls, but also amongst men and youths of all sorts and conditions. It is related of Louis XIV that during the closing years of his life he recited the Rosary daily. "I considered," says Silvio Pellico in His Letters, "and I saw that a Catholic may well, like the great Volta, humbly say the Rosary, and yet retain a sane, clear, and virile mind." And what Silvio Pellico writes about Volta might be said of another doctor

who was a man of genius as famous in the field of electricity, namely Ampère, and of numerous illustrious persons who, in spite of their overwhelming work, have been accustomed thus to honour and invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary every day.

II.

Furthermore, is it not true that the Rosary is made up of prayers of incomparable beauty?

Catholics possess numberless forms of prayer which are the touching and varied expression of pious feelings and of the confidence inspired in them by the Holy Ghost towards God, our Lady, the Angels, and the Saints. The holy Liturgy contains an inexhaustible treasury of them. Others are the outcome of the piety of individuals, and amongst the latter many have become popular and have been sanctioned by Church authority, which has enriched them with indulgences. But one need not hesitate to say that none of these fruits of Christian devotion can surpass the forms which compose the Rosary.

In the first place they consist of an act of faith expressed by the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, venerable as a profession of faith by its antiquity, and summing up

the verities which every Christian must believe for his salvation, a sacred formula which the martyrs used to repeat amidst their tortures to sustain their courage, and recited daily by the faithful in their morning and evening prayers.

Next there is the *Pater*, the Lord's Prayer, received by the Church from the very lips of the Word incarnate. Jesus Himself taught it to His Apostles to show us how to pray: it is, then, the most authentic, the holiest, the most divine of all prayers. It is, moreover, a prayer of incomparable simplicity, beauty, and definiteness, the substantial epitome of all the petitions we can offer to God. It is repeated six times in the course of the Rosary.

But the prayer that constitutes the basis of the Rosary is the *Ave*, or "Hail Mary," which amongst the prayers we address to Mary takes the same place as the *Pater* amongst those we offer to God. The first words of the *Ave* are, as everybody knows, those with which the Archangel Gabriel saluted Mary on the day of the Annunciation: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women." Then follow the words with which Elizabeth greeted Mary at the Visitation: "Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." The rest is a supplication which the Church has added in honour

of the Mother of God and in order to invoke her aid.*

Oh, how glorious a prayer is this for Mary, since it celebrates her greatness, her divine motherhood, and her all-powerfulness in supplication! How dear must it be to her, and how must it incline her to grant the petitions addressed to her while it is being recited! In everyone's life there are days that stand out as more beautiful than any others. Such a day we call the day of a lifetime, and we love anything that reminds us

* The "Hail Mary" in the form in which we say it now is of comparatively modern composition. The words in which the Angel saluted Mary appear in the Eastern Liturgies in the sixth century, and in the West, in the ninth century. In the twelfth century were added the words of St. Elizabeth: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb." This is the only form known to St. Bernard. When people began to repeat the 150 *Aves* of the Rosary, the prayer was much shorter than it is now. From the fourteenth century the *Ave* ends with the words, "Jesus. Amen," or "Jesus Christ. Amen," or "Jesus Christ, Amen, glorious and eternally blessed God." The words: "St. Mary, pray for us," and "Pray for us sinners," were gradually introduced between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The concluding "Now, and at the hour of our death" is to be found in the second half of the fourteenth century, but was not universally adopted by the beginning of the sixteenth century. St. Pius V in 1568 was the first to prescribe the recitation of the *Ave*, in the form now in use, at the beginning of the canonical hours" (*Revue pratique d'Apologétique*, October 1, 1909, p. 56).

of it. In Mary's life, such a day was that on which she learnt from the lips of the Angel that she was predestined to be the Mother of God, the day on which the divine Word became incarnate within her most pure womb. How, then, must Mary love to hear her children repeat the words of the angelic message proclaiming her own greatness and the salvation of the world !

But now arises a difficulty. This prayer, which is repeated fifty times during a single chaplet, and a hundred and fifty times in a complete Rosary, becomes monotonous, it is said. The constant repetition of the same form of words is wearisome, and it irks those who recite it.

We may admit that it is monotonous. But it is not true to say that it is irksome, when one can enter thoroughly into the deep meaning underlying it. Does not Father Faber hit the mark when he says: " Nearly everybody has some monotony of which he never gets tired."* One person tells us that for him it is the plaintive murmuring of the wind amidst the trees; for another it is the wash of the waves upon the shore; for another the sound of trickling water dripping from a mossy rock. Such people will stop for hours listening without weariness to the monotonous sounds that are dear to them. We may even say that love takes pleasure

* *Spiritual Conferences.*

in such monotony. Thus, when a child is crying, he is never weary of calling his mother, using the same call over and over again. And when he is happy, he never tires of kissing her in the same way again and again. Hence we may understand what Lacordaire has to say when he tells us of Mary: "Love has only one word, but in saying it over and over again, it never repeats itself."* And does not the beggar asking for an alms thus constantly murmur the same request? And does not the luckless wretch who cries out for assistance always repeat the same cry: "Help!"?

Then let it no more be objected that by constantly repeating the same thing we shall tire out the patience of God, because we shall suffer from distractions.

Of course, when one goes on repeating the same thing, it is difficult to think of each word one utters. But it is unnecessary to do so in order to say one's rosary well. What is needed is to begin with an earnest desire to pray, and then to continue with good will and reverence. If one cannot think of each word, one can at least think of God and of the Blessed Virgin. To think in a general way of some pious subject while saying one's rosary is an excellent way of reciting it. If one's imagination wanders despite one's good will, God who regards the

* *Vie de Saint Dominique*, chap. vi.

heart and intention rather than the deed will nevertheless hearken to one's prayer, and the Blessed Virgin, too, will take pleasure in it.

Furthermore, it is an excellent way of avoiding distractions in reciting the Rosary, and it is also the method which is most recommended by the Church, to think of one of the fifteen mysteries while repeating one decade. These joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries enable us to live over again the series of marvels which the Word incarnate from the day of His birth in this world until the hour of His return to His Father's right hand wrought in order to save us, mysteries wherewith the most holy Virgin, the co-redemptress of the human race, was also associated by God. At the beginning of each decade we call to mind one of these mysteries, meditating on it and impressing it on our hearts as deeply as possible; and the salutation of the Angel constantly reiterated permeates the soul with its spirit and power under the protection and influence of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"Sometimes the Rosary is charged with being a mechanical, formal, and servile form of prayer," writes a well-known author,* "and, if the way in which it is recited by some persons gives ground for such an opinion, it is nevertheless true that such

* Georges Goyau.

opinions, which lay claim to being enlightened, rest upon a narrow and formalist conception of what prayer itself really is.

"They accuse the teller of the rosary-beads of being parrot-like, but it is these very detractors whose attitude appears to reduce prayer to a mere repetition of words. It is they who attach to the bare words a greater importance than a sound philosophy of prayer will admit. For what is perfect prayer? It is a string of words, few or many, ending with a time of silence during which God fills the mind. What makes the mystic so enviable is the ineffable silence that follows upon the vocal phrases which, like other Christians, he has uttered.

"Words are the crutches with the help of which the soul endeavours to raise itself insensibly to what I shall call *the state of prayer* that crowns the act of praying.

"Words cannot contain all the reverence, all the thankfulness, nor all the penitence that we owe to God.

"Prayer tends to outrun its vocal utterance; it only submits to the fixed forms in order to transcend them. The murmured and lingering words repeated by suppliant lips make a barrier between the soul that prays and thoughts of outward things; but such a soul will not allow these poor human words with their narrowness and imperfec-

tion to become a barrier between it and God. Far beyond the words it seeks, if I may say so, to think of God without their assistance; under the shelter they afford, it tends towards intuitions which transcend them.

"Now this is just what the Rosary aims at: in trying to surmise and to compute the *élan* of prayer, we have given an interpretation of the Rosary.

"The *Aves* following upon one another always say the same thing, and their rhythm uplifts the soul to an atmosphere of prayer. This rhythm is to be scanned by the "feet" composing each decade; and each measure affords the suppliant soul an occasion for a fresh subject of contemplation. The words uttered by the lips guard and sustain the successive meditations on the mysteries: they become a kind of bark under the protection of which a spiritual sap rises and circulates, the thought of the suppliant letting them go while still following in their track, transcending them while it is being permeated by them. Beyond the words it contemplates the fifteen mysteries one after the other, rejoicing, suffering, and triumphing in them; the very atmosphere they create is favourable and indispensable for such a flight. This prayer, apparently verbal, is the freest of all; this prayer, apparently so slavish, is of all the most emancipated; this prayer, apparently so elementary, is of all

the most contemplative, and may become of all the most individual.

“On the canvas prepared by the soul, meditation weaves freely and at will a living image of the fifteen mysteries; and who can tell all the strong originality that is to be found in the contemplations of some of the humbler folk who, apparently bending over their rosaries, are really soaring far away from their *Aves*? To them the Rosary may be said to be a long distraction—Godwards; their soul follows the track indicated by their lips, rising ever upwards; and the ascent which it makes above and beyond the words brings them nearer to God, to Him who is the Unknown.

“Such is the unheard-of wealth of this prayer of the lowly. This most profound of all prayers is at the same time the most universally habitual and accessible. The art of understanding the meaning of the cathedrals, which the masses have lost since they learnt to read, was a help to the apprehension of the mysteries by the general run of the faithful; the coloured window-panes repeated for them the story of the Lord with its joys and sorrows; and the great rose-windows promised them the glory of the Kingdom of God. Their fingers followed the *Aves*, and their eyes followed the pictures in stained glass; and their souls soared ever higher and higher.”

III.

In conclusion, let us say a word about the graces to be gained by using the Rosary.

“It is well known,” says Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus*, “that this prayer is most profitable for obtaining heavenly help for everyone, and most fit for the defence of the Church and of the people of Christ.

“Everybody knows how many evils and afflictions the Albigensian heretics brought upon the Church at the end of the twelfth century. They sprang from the sect of the last of the Manichees, and had filled the South of France and the other Latin countries with the most pernicious errors. Divinely enlightened, St. Dominic saw that the Rosary would be the most powerful weapon for overcoming the enemies of the Church and for striking down their impiety. And this was proved by the event. In fact, the use of this prayer having spread abroad and become popular, according to the instructions and the institution of St. Dominic, piety, faith, and concord flourished once more, the schemes of the heretics came to grief, and their power ebbed gradually away; and lastly, many who had gone astray returned to the life of faith, and the fury of the im-

pious was subdued by the arms of Catholics who had to repel force by force.

“The effectiveness and power of this prayer were once more manifested in a marvellous manner in the sixteenth century, when the arms of the Turks threatened the whole of Europe with the yoke of superstition and barbarism. At that time the Sovereign Pontiff Pius V appealed to all Christian princes for the defence of their common interests, and began with putting forth all his zeal to get the most mighty Mother of God, invoked by the recitation of the Rosary, to come to the help of Christendom. An incomparable spectacle was afforded to both heaven and earth, and drew upon itself the thrilled attention of all men.

“On the one side were the faithful soldiers of Christ, ready to give their lives and to shed their blood for their faith and country, opposing the enemy fearlessly not far from the Gulf of Corinth; on the other were Christians unarmed, gathered together to pray for one thing, imploring and hailing Mary, untiringly repeating the Rosary to beg her to come to the help of the combatants and to give them victory. The Queen of heaven, thus earnestly invoked, intervened; for, in the naval battle of Lepanto, near the Echinades, the Christian fleet destroyed the enemy and won a striking victory without

sustaining much loss. And therefore St Pius V wished a feast in memory of the anniversary of the battle to be celebrated in honour of Mary the Victorious, and Gregory XIII consecrated the feast under the name of the Rosary.

“ In the same way, in the eighteenth century important successes were gained over the Turks both at Temesvar in Pannonia and at Corfu, and they coincided with the days set apart in honour of the Holy Virgin and with the close of the public prayers of Mary’s Rosary.”

Such, in the mind of the Sovereign Pontiffs, is the virtue of the holy Rosary for the common needs of the Church.

But who can say what is its effectiveness in our own particular needs? How many inward victories over evil spirits, the enemies of our souls, has it not won? How many are the sinners who owe their conversion to it! How many are the just who owe it any increase they have made in virtue! From what perils has it not saved souls? What temporal and spiritual favours has it not obtained?

Need one add that by reciting it we can also gain numerous indulgences? Those who say five mysteries on a duly blessed Rosary gain a hundred days on each bead. Those who use a Rosary blessed by the Canons of the Cross gain five hundred days

on each bead; and those who belong to the confraternity of the Rosary gain 2125 days.* Anyone may gain these indulgences without prejudice to a quantity of other partial indulgences to which they may have a right, or to the plenary indulgences which they may gain at a large number of feasts.

It was during the time of Protestant persecution in Great Britain. One night a Scotch bishop had to take refuge in a poor cottage where on a pallet lay an old man who seemed to have but a few moments to live. To the words of encouragement spoken by the bishop he replied: "I am at peace, I shall not die."—"Of course, I hope not," said the bishop, "but still it is always a good thing to get ready."—"I tell you I cannot possibly die," replied the dying man with still more energy. And to every consideration put forward by the bishop to get him to think of eternity he invariably answered: "I shall not die."

* They have first of all a right to a hundred days per bead of the blessed Rosary, and they also gain five years and five quarantines of indulgences because of the word "Jesus" which they insert in the *Ave Maria*. At the period when this indulgence was granted, the insertion of the name "Jesus" was not as yet universal. To bring it into use, Pope Innocent VIII granted five years and five quarantines of indulgences per bead to the confraternities of the Rosary which said: "Blessed be the fruit of thy womb, *Jesus*."

"Well then," said the bishop, who was concealing his rank, showing no outward sign of it because of the persecution, "may I ask why you are so sure that you are not going to die?"

"Are you a Catholic?" asked the sick man.—"Yes, I am," replied the bishop.—"Then," said the man, "I can tell you why I shall not die. From the day of my first Communion, I have never missed asking the Blessed Virgin every day not to let me die without a priest at my bedside, and do you think that my Mother could fail to answer my prayer? She cannot, and I shall not die."

"How good Mary is!" then exclaimed the bishop, deeply touched. Then he opened his coat and allowed his pectoral cross to shine in the old man's eyes. "Not only does she send you a priest, but your own bishop."

The dying man's eyes filled with tears, and looking up to heaven, he said: "Thank you, good Mother, I knew you had answered my prayer." Then turning to the bishop: "Hear my confession," he said; "now I think I shall die."

We, too, ask Mary daily, when we recite the Rosary, to "have mercy upon us sinners at the hour of our death." Let us not be satisfied with one or two *Aves*, but let us say the

whole Rosary if we possibly can—at least, let us not be content with less than a decade. Thus shall we obtain for the Church, for our country, for our neighbours, and for ourselves above all, every kind of favour, until we secure final perseverance and eternal happiness.

CHAPTER XIII

SAINT JOSEPH

HAVING considered the Most Holy Virgin, it is only right to turn to her pure spouse, who is appointed by divine Providence to be her support and the adoptive father of Jesus Christ.

Let us then inquire into the Gospel records of the life of St. Joseph, into what the Doctors and the Saints have to tell us of his greatness and virtues, and into the development of his cultus in the Church.

I.

Everyone knows that St. Joseph was a lowly artisan. "How came this man by his wisdom and miracles?" asked the people of Nazareth of our Lord during the course of His public life. "Is not this the carpenter's Son?"* Joseph lived by the work of his hands, following the trade of a carpenter.

But the purest of Israel's blood ran in his veins. We know from the records of St. Luke, and from the genealogies both of St.

* Matt. xiii. 55.

Matthew and St. Luke, that he was a descendant of the royal house of David. And when the Angel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth to announce the Incarnation of the Son of God, St. Joseph was betrothed to the Virgin Mary.

How old was he? According to all appearances, he was not young. "We constantly find," says M. de Rossi,* "that in the sarcophagi and monuments of the first four centuries the type of St. Joseph is quite different from that which we find later, and that he is always represented young and beardless." It is not until the fourth century that, taking their cue from the apocryphal gospels, a few of the Fathers made St. Joseph an old man. The apocryphal gospels do, indeed, unite to tell us that Joseph was much older than Mary. The writer of the Protevangel† makes him say: "I am an old man." According to the *History of St. Joseph*,‡ the saintly carpenter married Mary when he was ninety, and died at the age of a hundred and eleven. His old age, however, is said to have been like vigorous youth; his eye was not dim, nor had his vigour of mind diminished. St. Epiphanius§ follows this extravagant idea with obstinacy. By confidently accepting

* *Bulletino d'archeologia cristiana*, 1856, pp. 26-32, 66-72. † IX. 2. ‡ X.

§ Hæres, LI, LXXVIII.

the apocryphal traditions, St. Epiphanius paved the way for those who afterwards attributed to Joseph as children of a former marriage two daughters and four sons. But however great may be the authority of the Doctors, of Origen, of St. Gregory of Nyssa, of St. John Chrysostom, who shared this opinion, St. Jerome opposed them with vigour in his book against Helvidius, relying upon the authority of the apostolic Fathers, Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenæus, Justin Martyr, and the rest. And, as is well known, the apocryphal gospels have no authority.

There is, then, no serious proof that St. Joseph was of a ripe age, much less old in years, when he was betrothed and married to Mary. In the divine plan Joseph was to support the Holy Family by his labour, to shelter it under his protection, and to prevent calumny from casting suspicion upon the purest of wives. But all this was hardly the office of an aged man. Besides, those who know human nature will attest that it is not old age that guarantees purity, but virtue, and the latter is not less full of courage and force at the age of thirty than at the age of fifty. Youth in its generous ardour is never incapable of making great sacrifices.

However this may be, before he took Mary to his home as a wife, "it came to pass," as the Gospel tells us, "that Mary conceived

of the Holy Ghost, whereupon Joseph her husband, being a just man and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privily.”*

Indeed, Mary's pregnancy was becoming plain, and Joseph was full of anxiety and trouble. Not knowing the work was God's, his distress was extreme. He dared not cast any doubt on the virtue of his betrothed. Her incomparably pure girlhood, her serenity of look, told him clearly enough that the least suspicion would be a crime. And nevertheless his eyes revealed a state of things that filled his mind with anxiety. It would be too painful to enter into any explanations; St. Joseph understood better than any other how it would hurt her for whom he has had and still has so profound a regard. Yet it seems impossible to shut his eyes and to accept the situation. Nor will he break off abruptly, for “he is a just man and not willingly publicly to expose her.” The Jews, indeed, considering the betrothal as sacred as the marriage itself, the betrothed who was declared guilty openly was exposed to the utmost rigour of the law. And therefore he decides to put her away privily without any scandal.

“But while he thought on these things,” says St. Matthew,† “behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying:

* Matt. i. 18, 19.

† Matt. i. 20-25.

Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. . . . And Joseph rising up from sleep did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him and took unto him his wife. And he knew her not till she brought forth her first-born son: and he called his name Jesus."

These last words, as we have already shown in Chapter IX, indicate that Mary remained ever a virgin, and that Joseph always lived as if he were the brother of his spouse.

Between Mary and Joseph there was a sacred engagement whereby they mutually gave themselves entirely to each other. "Mary belongs to Joseph and Joseph to holy Mary in such a way that their marriage is a real marriage, because they have given themselves to one another. But in what manner did they do this? O Purity, here dost thou triumph!" says Bossuet.* "They give mutually to one another their virginity, and over this virginity they give each other mutual rights. What rights? To preserve it for each other. Yes, Mary has the right to guard Joseph's virginity, and Joseph has

* *Depositum custodi*, First Panegyric on St. Joseph.

the right to guard of Mary's. Neither of them can dispose of the virginity of the other, and the faithfulness to the marriage bond in the case of each consists in guarding that virginity. Such are the promises that bring them together, such is the contract that binds them. It is the uniting of two virginities in order to protect one another for all eternity by a chaste correspondence in modest desires; and in them I seem to behold two stars which only enter into conjunction with each other because their light combines in one. Such is this marriage-knot, all the more firmly tied because the promises they have made to one another must be all the more inviolable in proportion to their sanctity."

There is no need to tell how at the time of our Lord's birth the carpenter of Nazareth left the mountains of Zabulon to go with Mary to be enrolled in the public registers of Bethlehem, the cradle of the royal family. It was on the eighth day at Bethlehem that he circumcised the Holy Child.

To the father belonged the honour of imprinting on his child's body the traditional sign that distinguished the people of God from the surrounding nations. Hence it was Joseph who circumcised the Saviour and gave Him the heaven-sent name of Jesus.

After the Presentation in the Temple and

the visit of the Magi, an Angel warned him in a dream to fly into Egypt to protect the Holy Child from the persecution of Herod. There he lived in exile with Jesus and Mary until the tyrant's death. Then the Angel of the Lord appeared to him again in a dream and said: "Arise and take the child and his mother and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the child."*

And Joseph arose immediately, and went away to Judæa. He meant to settle in Bethlehem. His recollections of it recalled him thither, and moreover it was not fitting that this Child who was to rule over the world should live near Jerusalem and its Temple. But on its way the Holy Family heard that Archelaus was reigning in his father's stead. Judæa had only changed tyrants, for as a beginning the son of Herod had already slain three thousand of his subjects in the Temple itself. Joseph did not dare to expose the treasure entrusted to his care to such dangers. He turned his eyes to heaven, and he was warned from on high in a dream to withdraw into Galilee. On his death Herod had bequeathed this province to Herod Antipas, another of his sons. Under this corrupt but careless master, the Holy Child ran less risk. Thus Joseph returned to dwell at Nazareth, and thus was

* Matt. ii. 20.

fulfilled what was said by the Prophets: "that Jesus would be called a Nazarene."

About Joseph's life at Nazareth with Jesus and Mary the Gospel records nothing except the journey to Jerusalem, and the losing and finding of Jesus when He was twelve years old. But we know that Joseph continued to work as a carpenter to supply the needs of the Holy Family.

"In our various visits to Bethlehem," says Mgr. Le Camus,* "we often took a pious pleasure in reconstructing the humble and peaceful surroundings in which Jesus spent thirty years of His life. The poor carpenter's workshop is open on the side of the street, and the back runs vault-like into the rock. At the entrance are a few simple tools hanging on the wall, or lying in half-closed boxes. They tell us plainly that neither the skill of the workman nor even his tools have made any progress through the ages in the little township. Roughly squared logs of sycamore or oak lie here and there along with the yokes of ploughs and a few primitively designed pieces of furniture. The stall has no extension to be used as a kitchen or parlour. The workman of to-day, as of yore, prefers his home to be apart from his workshop. There one must go to visit him and to study the details of his family life. On the balcony, approached by an outside

* *Vie de N.-S. Jesus -Christ*, i, 232, 233.

staircase, are the children solemnly seated round three stones forming a hearth, or round a clay oven watching dutifully the antique *olla*, a modest jar encircled with smoke, which wavers in its upward ascent. Soon there appears a young woman whose pure and gentle eyes are veiled by the long lashes, and she is the mother of the family. The Christian faith has set its stamp upon her, so that she reminds one of the Virgin Mary. She has just come back from the well, bearing lightly on her head a pitcher filled for the evening meal. One word and one glance suffice to tell her that all has been in order during her absence. Then she at once busies herself in laying the cloth where the family will take its repast at sunset. . . . Soon the father returns from his workshop, and looks happy as he stands on the threshold of his home."

Thus lived the Holy Family during the childhood of Jesus. And when He was full grown, He worked along with St. Joseph.

Everything seems to point to the death of the holy Patriarch having occurred during the hidden life of our Saviour. Indeed, his name does not appear in the Gospels during our Lord's public life, either at the marriage-feast of Cana or at the departure for Capharnaum, nor is it found in the other episodes where the relations of Christ are mentioned, and where it was therefore to be looked for.

“ He and His mother and His brethren ” are spoken of, but His father’s name is omitted. Nor would Jesus have left His mother at Calvary to St. John, if Joseph her husband had been still alive. Joseph, then, must have died at Nazareth while Jesus was young, in the arms of Mary and with the Saviour’s kiss upon his brow. Since his rôle of protector and guardian of Jesus and Mary was over, it pleased God to call him to Himself before the public ministry of Jesus began.

II.

But it is not enough to get to know the outward life of St. Joseph. “ His glory is truly from within,” as to his virtues. It also lies in the greatness of the rôle he had to fulfil. Let us then study and try to understand this.

St. Joseph was the husband of Mary, and the adoptive father of Jesus Christ. The very Son of God treated him as His father. This is the name applied to him in the Gospel,* and Mary used it also. “ Thy father and I have sought Thee,”† she said to Jesus.

What Angel, what Saint, ever merited being called the father of the Son of God ? Joseph alone received this honour, and thereby, as the Saints tell us, he surpasses in dignity all

* Luke ii. 33.

† Luke ii. 48.

the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Pontiffs, whom God calls no more than "His servants and friends."

It was in virtue of this that he was made the head of the Holy Family. God appointed him "Master of his house." There Joseph gave orders, and the Son of God obeyed. "He was subject unto them," says St. Luke. What higher dignity could anyone have than that of ordering the King of kings? As long as Joseph was alive our Lord showed him such respect as to obey him as He did His heavenly Father. Whatever Jesus did, whatever steps He took, His meals, His sleep, and His work, all were ruled by St. Joseph's orders.

There is, indeed, no doubt of the greatness of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and of all the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Law, but does it approach the greatness of St. Joseph? To Him, of whom they only caught a distant glimpse, Joseph speaks and issues commands. Him whom they called their Lord and King Joseph calls his son.

The Apostles lived in the closest intimacy with our Lord; St. John at the Last Supper reposed on Jesus Christ's heart and received Mary from His hands at Calvary. But all this seems to pale before Joseph's sublime rôle, to be the foster-father of a God.

Then, as to the question of sanctity, let us recall the principle quoted from St. Thomas

with regard to the Blessed Virgin: "When God intends anyone for an office, He endues him with all the graces required for its worthy fulfilment." God, intending Joseph to fulfil the office of father to the Word incarnate, must certainly have endued him with all the gifts of wisdom and holiness proper to the carrying out of such a charge.

"If God," says M. Olier,* "entrusts the governance and the protection of kingdoms to most mighty Angels, and even to the greatest and highest of such angelic intelligences, if He also appoints some of these pure spirits for the conduct of the heavenly spheres and the vast worlds of space, what must be the greatness of the Saint to whom God has committed the guidance of His own Son, who is far more precious than hundreds of thousands of worlds and than hundreds of millions of kingdoms? What illumination is required for guiding and directing in everything that Son whose every motion and step were so precious and so dear!"

One cannot doubt but that the Lord enriched him with all the favours and privileges granted to other Saints. Gerson says that St. Joseph received amongst other privileges three in chief: the first, to be sanctified from his mother's womb, as was St. John Baptist; the second, likewise to be confirmed in grace; the third, to be always free from the inclina-

* *Grandeurs de Saint-Joseph.*

tions of concupiscence, a grace which his purity imparts to those who are devout to him, by delivering them from the lusts of the flesh.

St. Joseph was sanctified in his mother's womb. Doubtless the Immaculate Conception was Mary's exclusive privilege. But, according to the greatest Doctors, although St. Joseph had original sin like other men, he was cleansed from it sooner than anyone else. If St. John Baptist, who was to be the Forerunner, was sanctified shortly before he was born, how could the foster-father of Jesus and husband of Mary fail to be so earlier still?

And his sanctity constantly increased through his perfect correspondence with grace all his life long. Who can tell of his interior life, his spirit of prayer, his love of God, and at the same time of his humility, his character, and purity?

In the Gospel Joseph is called a "just man." And what can that mean but that he was perfectly virtuous? Joseph was holy even before his marriage, but his sanctity must have been much increased by his union with the Mother of God; her mere example was enough to sanctify him. And how much more must his sanctity have been increased by his intimate relationships with Jesus Christ during so many years? We cannot doubt but that St. Joseph, by living

with Jesus, continued to increase in sanctity and to acquire merits greater than those of the other Saints.

But, seeing that in the next world each will be rewarded according to his merits, what higher glory can there be in heaven than that possessed by St. Joseph?

And how great, too, must be his power! The Saints tell us that his power with God is boundless. It is boundless with God the Father. Joseph has but to remind Him that he was His representative and helper on earth, and nothing is refused him. It is boundless, too, with Jesus. When St. Joseph implores our Lord he is always answered, for "when a father begs of his son," says Gerson, "his prayer has the force of a command." St. Joseph has but to name Bethlehem or Nazareth to touch the heart of Jesus with pity.

Nor can the heart of Mary resist the memory of so many labours and services, the memory of a union so pure that He who was the fruit of her womb owed His preservation to them.

St. Bernard, speaking of the credit enjoyed by St. Joseph on behalf of his devout clients, says that what distinguishes him from other Saints is "that he can protect *all* who have recourse to him and help them in *all* their needs."

Many other Saints, especially St. Teresa,

speak in the same sense. "I never remember," she says, "asking him for anything without his getting it for me. So far as the other Saints are concerned, it appears that the Lord has given them the power to help us in some particular necessity only: but experience shows, on the contrary, that St. Joseph helps us in all our needs, and that our Lord is pleased thereby to testify to us that, as it was His will to be subject to the authority of this great Saint upon earth, so does He in heaven carry out all his requests."

III.

Since St. Joseph is so great and powerful, how is it that his cultus has spread so slowly, and only at a very late period, in the Church? Was it the will of divine Providence that he who appeared to be the father of the Word incarnate should be forgotten in the earliest ages in order to deprive heretics of any objection to the divine generation of our Lord and to the virginity of Mary? These are secrets which we cannot penetrate.* But it

* Cardinal Newman gives in the following passage another and an interesting explanation of the working of divine Providence:

"Yet there were Saints nearer to our Lord than either Martyrs or Apostles; but, as if these sacred persons were immersed and lost in the effulgence of His glory, and because they did not manifest themselves, when in the body, in external works

must be admitted that the darkness that hid Joseph from the eyes of men during his mortal

separate from Him, it happened that for a long while they were less dwelt upon. However, in process of time, the Apostles, and then the Martyrs, exerted less influence than before over the popular mind, and the local Saints, new creations of God's power, took their place, or again, the Saints of some religious Order here or there established. Then, as comparatively quiet times succeeded, the religious meditations of holy men and their secret intercourse with heaven gradually exerted an influence out of doors, and permeated the Christian populace, by the instrumentality of preaching and by the ceremonial of the Church. Hence at length those luminous stars rose in the ecclesiastical heavens, which were of more august dignity than any which had preceded them, and were late in rising, for the very reason that they were so specially glorious. Those names, I say, which at first sight might have been expected to enter soon into the devotions of the faithful, with better reason might have been looked for at a later date, and actually were late in their coming. St. Joseph furnishes the most striking instance of this remark; here is the clearest of instances of the distinction between doctrine and devotion. Who, from his prerogatives and the testimony on which they come to us, had a greater claim to receive an early recognition among the faithful than he? A Saint of Scripture, the foster-father of our Lord, he was an object of universal and absolute faith of the Christian world from the first, yet the devotion to him is of comparatively late date. When once it began, men seemed surprised that it had not been thought of before: and now they hold him next to the Blessed Virgin in their religious affection and veneration" (*Anglican Difficulties*, ii, p. 30. Longmans, 1910).

life appears to have hung over him long after his death.

Doubtless the early Fathers, whenever his venerated name occurs in their writings, allow themselves to use the language of the highest enthusiasm. St. Jerome praised the virginity of Joseph, and St. John Chrysostom speaks movingly of his sorrows and joys; St. Augustine shows us that with regard to Jesus he has all the characteristics of true fatherhood except one; and Bossuet wrote two eloquent panegyrics to extol him, both of them almost entirely composed of extracts from the earliest ages. Yet it is no less true that the public worship of the Patriarch came into existence quite late.

Although in the East we hear of a church built in honour of St. Joseph at Bethlehem by the Empress St. Helena, and of a feast pretty generally celebrated in the oriental Churches from the ninth century, nevertheless in the West the worship of the foster-father of our Lord is of later date.

In mediæval times, when the diligent piety of the faithful delighted in glorifying all the friends of God, and when along with the innumerable churches consecrated to our Lady others were erected to St. John Baptist, St. Stephen, and St. Martin, St. Joseph, who was greater than all of these, appeared to be in some measure frustrated of his rights. Yet it would be wrong to say, as is often said,

that in the West before St. Teresa the devotion to St. Joseph was entirely unknown to the faithful. St. Teresa belongs to the sixteenth century, and amongst the Benedictines St. Joseph was held in honour from the twelfth century. In the thirteenth the Carmelites spread over Europe and propagated his cultus with great zeal. Other religious orders did the same. At the beginning of the fifteenth century John Gerson worked with all his might to disseminate the worship of the great Patriarch, and for that purpose he begged the Council of Constance to institute a feast of St. Joseph for the universal Church. In 1481 Sixtus V made the feast a feast of obligation.

Still at this period but very few chapels are to be found dedicated to the holy Patriarch. Bologna claims the glory of having erected the first church in the West, about the twelfth century, to St. Joseph in honour of hearing St. Bernardine of Siena devote to him an entire sermon, which was at that time a rare thing to do.

In the sixteenth century St. Teresa seems to have received a special mission to make St. Joseph known and to propagate the devotion to him. "Oh," she exclaims, "that I might convince all men that they should honour this glorious Saint with an especial devotion! The graces God has wrought for me through his intercession are marvellous.

I beg all who do not believe me to try this experiment for the love of God; they will soon acknowledge the advantages of the devotion to this great Saint, and will never fail in the future to have recourse to him."

Along with her, and following her in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, came others, such as Suarez, St. Francis of Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, Olier, Bossuet, and in the eighteenth century St. Alphonsus de Liguori; and all these work to further the worship of the great Patriarch.

At the same time there are many Popes who recommend this devotion until at last Pius IX proclaims St. Joseph the Patron of the universal Church.* And since this act of Pius IX, with the encouragement of Leo XIII and Pius X, the worship of St. Joseph has gone on increasing, and appears destined to grow daily more and more.

"There are reasons," says Leo XIII,† "for all sorts and conditions of men of all countries to recommend and entrust themselves to the faithful keeping of Blessed Joseph.

"Fathers of families find in Joseph the

* Since the Church is the mystical body of Jesus, Joseph is the born Protector of the Church, as he was of Jesus.

† The encyclical *Quamquam pluries*.

most beautiful personification of vigilance and paternal care; husbands, a perfect example of love, sympathy, and conjugal fidelity; virgins, not only a pattern but a protector of their unspotted virginity.

“Let those of noble birth learn from St. Joseph to preserve their dignity, even in misfortune; let the rich be taught by him what are the goods we ought to desire and secure by making every effort.

“As to the people, the working-class, and those of modest circumstances, they have a special right to have recourse to Joseph and to try to imitate him. For Joseph, indeed, though of royal race and united in marriage with the greatest and holiest of women, and regarded as the father of the Son of God, still spends his time in toil and looks to his labour as an artisan for all that is required to support his family.”

By reason of his immense power with God all kinds of favours may be asked of St. Joseph. But, above all, he is implored to grant the love of Jesus, whom he loved and served in such a special manner.

He is also specially invoked to obtain a good death. Having himself received in his last moments the help of Jesus and Mary, he can procure for those who invoke him the same assistance and the grace of a holy death.

We have, too, a sublime model of devotion

to St. Joseph, the Holy Child Himself who loved him so dearly and wants us to love him even as He does. Jesus Christ's respect and love for His foster-father afford us an example of the veneration and affection which we should have for St. Joseph on earth while waiting for the rapture and delight we shall find in contemplating and loving him in heaven.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEVOTION TO THE HOLY ANGELS

BELOW the most Holy Trinity, below the adorable humanity of our Lord, below the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven and earth because she is the Mother of God, below even—as we believe*—St. Joseph the foster-father of a God and patron of the universal Church, are drawn up in array the angelic hosts, dazzling in their splendour and marvellous in might.

Let us now consider their mission towards ourselves, the worship we owe them, and more particularly the devotion that each one of us ought to have towards his own guardian Angel.

I.

Many passages of Holy Scripture prove that God often makes use of the ministry of Angels. We all know how they appeared to Abraham, Jacob, Isaias, Daniel, Zacharias,

* In the Liturgy the Angels and St. John Baptist have the precedence of St. Joseph, but theologians are coming more and more to recognize that St. Joseph's glory and power are higher than theirs.

the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to the Shepherds. Without, however, dwelling upon these extraordinary occurrences let us now consider the ordinary ministry of Angels to mankind.

It is a generally admitted doctrine that Angels are set over nations by God to protect them. They keep watch over the peoples entrusted to their care, and intercede on their behalf. Thus we find in the tenth chapter of Daniel that the Angel who appears to the Prophet tells him that he has been charged to watch over Darius the Mede, and to remain near him to sustain and encourage him. In the same chapter we see the Angel of the Persians pleading against the Archangel Gabriel in order to keep the Jewish people still amidst the nation entrusted to him, doubtless because the Jews did the Persians good by causing the true religion to shine brightly amongst them. In the Acts of the Apostles it is related that a man of Macedonia appeared to St. Paul in a dream, begging him to go to Macedonia and to preach the faith there. Many commentators see in this Macedonian the angelic protector of that country, and affirm that God sends Angels to watch over every people on the earth.

A fortiori has the universal Church an Angel to watch over and defend and pray for her, and probably the same may be said

of each church in particular, and perhaps of each parish. The Synagogue used to invoke St. Michael as its guardian Angel; the Church and France believe that this great Archangel is now specially commissioned to watch over them.

But the goodness of God not only extends to societies through the vigilance of His celestial ministers, it reaches even to individuals. The Psalmist tells us how the Angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him. And in Psalm xc we read: "He hath given His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands shall they bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Judith glorifies the Lord because His Angel has kept her amidst the Assyrian army from all defilement. The Fathers take as referring to guardian Angels the words of Jesus as to the respect due to children: "Take care not to scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, for I say unto you that their Angels in heaven always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."* Commenting on Psalm cxxxiv St. Hilary quotes these words of our Lord and adds:† "Thus these Angels have been sent for the salvation of the human race. In fact, our weakness could not withstand the numerous and dangerous wiles of the evil spirits that fill the air if

* Matt. xviii. 8. • † *Patrolog. lat.*, ix, 761.

Angels had not been appointed to guard us. For such a struggle we need the help of a nature higher than our own."

The ministry of guardianship exercised by Angels with regard to men is affirmed by Holy Scripture and by all the voices of Tradition. The Church has introduced the devotion to the Guardian Angels into her public worship by appointing a feast in their honour on October 2. A good number of local Councils have commended this devotion. That Angels are deputed to watch over men in a general way is therefore a doctrine of the faith.

And the doctrine that a special Angel is assigned to the protection of each individual, if not of faith, is nevertheless certain. No doubt but that several of the Fathers, when they speak of this guardianship of Angels over men, make an explicit mention of the baptized only, and some Fathers even appear to teach that the Angels abandon men when they sin. But if heathen nations had their tutelary Angels, one cannot see why private persons should be without them. To-day it is commonly taught that every soul has a special Guardian Angel.

It was not God's will that one portion of His children should enjoy selfish pleasures near Him while the rest were fighting and suffering on the earth. It was His will that all the members of His family should be

united, that the strong should help the weak, and the happy the miserable.

It is a certain and invariable fact that God sends to each of us an Angel whose duty it is to attend and guide us all our life long until the day of eternity comes.

A little child has only just been born. Immediately God on His heavenly throne deposes one of His Angels to be its guardian and companion through life. Happy in his mission the heavenly envoy flies to the cradle of the new-born babe. The child will be henceforward the object of his most tender care, and he will never leave it. Perhaps he will see the infant become a young man, yielding like the Prodigal Son to the heat of passion, leaving God to go astray in sin and the paths of evil. Nevertheless, the Angel will not leave him. He will be ever at his side to fulfil the mission confided to him. From the cradle to the grave he will keep close to him, and will accompany him after death to the judgment of God.

How much our Guardian Angel loves us we cannot understand, for God endues him with a charity proportioned to his duties. Man can love, no doubt, but on earth he cannot rival such an Angel because his love is hampered by the senses, and a host of the things of this world have a share in it because most of his affections are tinctured

with selfishness. The Angel has no such infirmities to contend with; he is free from the senses, never disturbed by passion, never impeded by selfishness. He constantly re-kindles his ardour at the bosom of God.

The beauty of man's soul, which is higher than that of any of the created things around us, only strengthens an Angel's love for us. As long as we are in this life a veil conceals this beauty from us, but the Angel is able to contemplate it. He admires and loves our souls, beholding not only their natural splendours, but also the supernatural ones with which God has endued them. He loves them still more because of God's love for them. He knows that on behalf of men's souls God Himself was made a child, laboured as a poor working-man, died on the cross, and remains a prisoner in the tabernacle.

With what care and tenderness must his mission be fulfilled! When the friends of this world are driven by our failings or misfortunes to leave us in the lurch, when death mercilessly robs us one by one of those whom we love, the Angel of the Lord stays at our side.

"In journeying through the wilderness Israel had to contend with numbers of enemies who conspired together to destroy him. Pharaoh pursued him to carry him back into Egypt and to enslave him anew. Amalek wanted to stop him on his way; and other

nations endeavoured to bar his path towards the promised land. But the Scriptures tell us that the Angel of God was with him and strove to defend him. Thus helped and strengthened he overcame all his enemies in spite of his weakness.

"Alas! we know only too well, and our daily experience confirms us in our conviction, that the paths of life are not less dangerous to us than were the tracks through the wilderness to the Israelites. Our twofold life of the body and of the spirit can only be preserved at the cost of incessant strife. How many causes of destruction threaten the former at every moment! Satan tempts us, the world seduces us, passion carries us away, and all of these threaten the latter.

"But according to the beautiful figure used by the Psalmist, the Angel of the Lord camps round about them that fear Him, and protects them from danger, *Immittet Angelus Domini in circuitu timentium eum, et eripiet eos.*

"In the temporal sphere, from how many accidents has our good Angel not preserved us, how many dangers has he not helped us to escape? More than once in our lives we have owed it to some slight and insignificant circumstance, to a sudden unreasoning decision, to some involuntary delay, or to a mere misunderstanding, that we have been

saved from some grave risk to which in all probability we should have otherwise succumbed. We then admired and blessed divine Providence for having so visibly protected us. Surely our gratitude was just, but, in thanking God, ought we not also to thank our good Angel?

"Though his guardianship is profitable in things temporal, it is still more so in things spiritual. How many subtle temptations has he not helped us to surmount? How many dangerous occasions has he not warded off?

"In the countless assaults which make up the whole story of our interior life, when we have so often felt that we were on the point of yielding, when the senses, the imagination, and seductive illusions, all uniting together, seemed almost bound to win an easy triumph over us, what was it that sustained our wavering will? Was it not often our good Angel?"*

He it was who kept off the devil and his wiles. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood," says St. Paul, "but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places."† Satan brought about the fall of our first parent, and now sends his demons to compass our downfall. Doubtless, not all the temptations we meet

* Branchereau, *Méditations*, iv, 230, 231.

† Eph. vi. 12.

with are to be ascribed to demons; generally, our evil natures and bad habits are enough to account for them; nevertheless, it is certain that demons attack every one of us with spite, skill, and violence. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour,"* says St. Peter. But the Angel of the Lord is with us close at hand to support us and help us to triumph.

At the same time, he presents our prayers and good deeds to God. Jacob in his dream saw Angels ascending and descending the mysterious ladder set up between earth and heaven, and our Lord tells the Apostles that they will see Angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man. In the case of our souls, Jacob's vision and our Lord's prophecy are being constantly fulfilled.

"The Angels offer our alms and good works to God, they gather up even our desires, they make even our very thoughts count before God. Above all, who can tell their joy on being able to present God with the tears of a penitent, or labours endured for the love of Him with humility and patience. . . . How happy are we to possess friends so serviceable, such faithful intercessors, such charitable interpreters!"†

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

† Bossuet, *Panegyrique pour la fête des Anges gardiens*.

II.

And seeing that the Angels surround us with such attention and care, is it not right for us to think of them, to testify our gratitude to them, and to venerate them? No doubt they will not abandon us, even if we forget them. But to honour them faithfully, to invoke them with confidence, this is clearly a fresh ground for securing a claim upon their good will, a reason for hoping for still more abundant help.

St. Bernard tells us to honour our Guardian Angels chiefly in three ways. We ought to respect them, he says, because of their presence; we ought to be grateful to them because of their services; and we ought to confide in them and invoke them because of their power and love for us.

First, we ought to respect the presence of our Guardian Angels. These pure spirits, these heavenly princes, are ever near us. They are the witnesses of all our actions. Along with the thought of the presence of God, what is more fitted to fill us with self-respect? When someone we reverence has his eye upon us, we keep watch over ourselves. How can we show less respect for our good Angel? If we always remembered his presence, what a number of sins we should avoid! "Dare not," said St.

Bernard to one of his religious, "to commit a fault in his presence which you would not dare to commit in mine." *Tu ne audeas, illo præsente, quod me præsente non auderes.**

We owe it to our Guardian Angel not only to respect his presence, we ought to have a real love for him, a real gratitude towards him. There is no father or brother or friend whose affection for us can surpass his love of us. Men often like us for reasons of self-interest, and hence they easily forget us when we are in misfortune, and still more so if we offend them; but our Guardian Angel loves us entirely out of charity. Therefore he helps us especially in tribulation, and does not abandon us even when we happen to fall into sin. He then tries to open our eyes and to bring us back to God by prompt repentance. If, then, we are sure of the love of our Guardian Angel, he, too, ought to be able to count upon ours. It is our duty to love him and be grateful to him, for there is no fault that is more revolting than the too common one of ingratitude.

Lastly, let us have great confidence in the assistance of our Guardian Angel, and we must not omit to invoke him. Yet many people forget to do this. They apply to all kinds of lesser Saints to preserve them from misfortunes and accidents, to get this or that

* *Serm. XII in Ps. xc.*

virtue or favour, and they never think of addressing him who has been specially charged by God with particular powers for such a purpose. This is illogical. No good Christian should spend a single day without turning at least for a moment to pray to his Guardian Angel and to honour him with his heart. Nor is it a rare thing after a prayer to one's Guardian Angel to get an illumination of the mind, strength for the will, or some long-desired temporal help.

The Church counsels us to venerate the Guardian Angels. She has instituted the feast of October 2 in their honour.

She also gives special honour to St. Michael, St. Raphael, and St. Gabriel; and in her Litanies she often invokes all the angelic hosts. Let us follow her counsels and example, for our duty and interest pledge us to do so.

The book of Tobias offers us a splendid instance of the rôle of the Guardian Angels with regard to those who are entrusted to their care. Life is a long and dangerous journey. As Tobias had the Archangel Raphael for his guide, we have at our side a companion who is far more holy and shrewd and powerful than ourselves. He is there, ever ready to enlighten us and to teach us the best way to act in any important crisis; he is there to protect us and

to ward off all dangers. Let us show respect for his presence, hearken to his voice, and ask him to assist us more and more. Having confidence in God, and relying on our heaven-sent Envoy, we shall all the more easily triumph over the devil and our evil inclinations.

CHAPTER XV

THE CULTUS OF THE SAINTS

It is right, as has been shown in the preceding chapter, to pay veneration to the Angels, and especially to honour and invoke those whom God has appointed to be our Guardian Angels. But is it equally fitting and profitable to honour and invoke the Saints ?

In the eighth and ninth centuries the iconoclast heretics who were protected by the Emperors Leo the Isaurian and Constantine Copronymus raged against the pictures and statues of the Saints, and dared to affirm that the worship paid to them is idolatry. The Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century went still further. Reviving the blasphemies of the iconoclasts against pictures and statues, they attacked even the cultus of the Saints. There are also numbers of unbelievers of our own times, who see in the cultus of the Saints nothing but a remnant of polytheism, and claim to find the origin of it in the pagan cultus of the gods.

Let us then now study the appropriateness of the homage paid to the Saints, and to

their relics and representations. We will also consider the lawfulness and the profitableness of the prayers addressed to them, and the origin of the worship paid them by the Church.

I.

We are naturally inclined to admire and glorify all that is noble and beautiful and illustrious. What is there that we are not ready to do for the great? We load them with praise, crown them with honours, engrave their names on monuments, and set up statues of them.

But are not the Saints the greatest of all men? We shall certainly be convinced of it if we consider their heroic virtues and the good they have done to their fellows. And although the merits of other great men are often offset by pride and other moral defects, in the case of the Saints the highest perfection, moral perfection of an heroic degree, is always found united with the deepest humility. Hence, no man is so worthy of honour as the Saint.

Moreover, in this matter, God is pleased to give us an example. He treats the Saints as kings in heaven; He gives them a glory which we in this world cannot understand; many of them he puts higher than the Angels, and He makes them His friends, sharing His own beatitude with them.

And this honour paid by God to the Saints marks out our duty for us. God cannot possibly rebuke us for paying homage to those whom He Himself loads with glory and honour. On the contrary, since He glorifies them, He desires us to glorify them also.

Besides, when we honour them we at the same time honour the divine Majesty. The worship we pay them is not the supreme worship of adoration, it is a worship of honour, of veneration, a subordinate worship. When we glorify them, we know and acknowledge, at any rate implicitly, that they owe everything to God; and the glory we render to them redounds to the Author of every perfect gift. Far from robbing God of anything, he who venerates the Saints really gives honour to God and to Jesus Christ.

But we can and must honour not only the persons of the Saints, the Church also invites us to venerate their relics—*i.e.*, their bodies, their bones, and the things they made use of.

Honours are paid to the mortal remains of famous men: thus we keep a distinguished commander's sword, an eminent scholar's books. In our families we venerate certain things which belonged to a deceased father or mother, or to a departed friend. All the more is it right that we should honour the relics of the Saints.

The early Christians often risked their lives to secure the body of a martyr, and used to dip their linen in their generous blood. Later on, these bodies were enclosed in costly shrines or reliquaries, magnificent churches were built in their honour, they were borne in triumph on feast-days, and long pilgrimages were undertaken to visit them.

That God is pleased with such devotions is an undoubted fact, for He has always made His favours, and even miracles, to abound in connection with holy relics to reward the confidence of the faithful.

"The faithful," says the Council of Trent,* "ought to venerate the bodies of the holy Martyrs and others who live with Christ: they were the living members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost, and they will rise again unto eternal life and glory. Through them many divine favours are bestowed upon men."

It is good to venerate the relics of the Saints. So too is it right to honour their images.

"The images of the Saints," adds the Council, "are also to be retained, especially in churches, and they must be paid the honour and reverence which are their due. It is not to be thought that they have anything divine in them, or some authority that compels us to honour them; we do not

* Sess. 25.

beg them for anything, and we do not put our confidence in the images as the pagans of old put their hope in idols. But the honour paid them redounds to the persons whom they represent, so that when we kiss their images or uncover our heads or prostrate ourselves before them, we adore Christ and venerate the Saints whose features they reproduce."

It must be well noted that the reverence we pay to images and relics does not stop short at them. It is referred to the Saints themselves, and to God the Author of all sanctity. Therefore it would not fail in its object, even if the image venerated or the place where prayer is offered had not the origin attributed to them, or even if the relic were not incontestably authentic. Superstition is the only thing to be condemned—that is to say, a vain belief in the virtues appertaining to sensible things.

No doubt in the Old Law God forbade the Jews to make such a regular and frequent use of images as the Church now invites us to do. But that is because the Jews were naturally inclined to idolatry. Moreover, they were surrounded with nations which might easily have misinterpreted the nature and use of such representations. Governed by the same prudent motives, and fearing that their images might be confused with heathen idols, the early Christians showed

much more reserve in their use than we do, allowing them very rarely to be seen by the pagans, amidst whom they had to live.

And yet they already made some use of them. The catacombs to which only the faithful were admitted are filled with sacred emblems and pious images, which are still preserved, as if to testify to the practice of the primitive Church.

And is it not true that, if it is a natural thing to keep in one's home the portraits of one's ancestors, it is also quite natural to adorn one's house with the pictures and statues of one's fathers and examples in the faith? The contemplation of such pious images purifies our affections, elevates our thoughts, checks our levity, and surrounds us with an atmosphere of supernatural health and life. In their presence we feel as if we were associating with the just, and we are led to imitate the virtues of those whose features we behold.

It is therefore wise and right to honour and venerate the Saints, and their relics and images, whether these be statues, pictures, or on medals.

II.

But it is not enough to honour the Saints; the Church also invites us to invoke them.

We know how good it is to get the prayers

of the righteous who are still living. How much better must it be to invoke the Saints who enjoy the presence of God in heaven? "The Saints who reign in glory with Jesus Christ," says the Council of Trent, "offer God their prayers on behalf of men: it is therefore good and profitable to invoke them humbly and to have recourse to their prayers and assistance to obtain from God favours through His Son Jesus Christ, who alone is our Redeemer and Saviour."

Even under the Old Law the doctrine that the Saints after death pray for their brethren was clearly asserted. In the Book of Machabees we read that Judas the Machabean, on the night before his struggle with the impious Nicanor, had a supernatural dream or vision in which he perceived the High Priest Onias, who was just dead, and the prophet Jeremias. Onias appeared to him with arms outstretched praying for God's people, and pointing him to Jeremias, said: "This is a lover of his brethren and of the people of Israel: this is he that prayeth much for the people and for the holy city, Jeremias, the prophet of God."* And Jeremias gave Judas a sword, saying that it should help him to overcome his enemies.

"To beg the prayers of our brethren in heaven is to act in conformity with the teaching of Holy Scripture, but it is also to

* 2 Mach. xv. 14.

obey our natural instincts. The Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints," says Cardinal Gibbons,* "robs death of its terrors, while the reformers of the sixteenth century by denying this truth not only inflicted a mortal wound upon the Creed, but also injured the finest fibres of man's heart. They broke the sacred bonds that bound earth to heaven, and severed the living from the dead. If my brother leaves me to cross the ocean, I believe that he still prays for me. When he crosses the narrow channel of death and reaches the shores of eternity, why shall he not go on praying for me? What does death destroy? The body: the soul lives on, and still moves and has its being. It thinks, wills, remembers, and loves. The rust of sin and selfishness and hatred has been consumed in the salutary fires of contrition and expiation, and only the pure gold of charity remains. . . . Far be the thought that the Saints reigning in heaven think of us no more. Their strongest desire is to see us one day wear the crowns which await us in the heavenly mansions. If they can be touched by grief, it would arise from this consideration, that in this world we do not always follow in their footsteps to secure our eternal happiness."

The Saints are our advocates and intercessors with God: and let this too be said

* *The Faith of our Fathers.*

in answer to Protestants, that their secondary mediation does not hinder our Lord from being the great and only supreme Mediator.

As Dom Cabrol* remarks: "There is a deep abyss between God and man. God is absolute, infinite, perfect. . . .

"The Son of God by coming down from heaven and taking human flesh made a bridge between man and God across the infinite. He is the Mediator between God and man, and the Intercessor and Advocate of mankind with God: Jesus is *Emmanuel*, 'God with us.' With Him God came down to earth, and man was lifted up to heaven. Herein lies the whole of Christianity. The essential characteristic of Christian worship, that which differentiates it from deist forms of worship, is that the Christian offers his prayers through Jesus Christ.

"But being accustomed to look for a mediator and to fly to Christ for refuge and to receive forgiveness of his sins, the Christian felt he had to go in quest of other intercessors.

"The more he thought of God's greatness and of his own wretchedness, the more did he feel the need of such protection. After the Son of God he next sought refuge with his holy Mother, and wished for the patronage of those friends of God who had died for

* *Le Livre de la prière antique*, 272, 273.

the love of Him and now enjoy eternal happiness in His presence.

"These inferior patrons in no wise lessen the rôle of the supreme Mediator, they rather throw it into relief. We only implore the protection of the Saints because they are the friends of our Lord. They are nearer to us than the face of God, and in a manner more accessible, since the sinner comes to them with less awe, because they are our fellows, simply men. . . .

"We honour them in so far as they are united to God, and the worship we pay to them ascends always to Him who has created and sanctified them."

Hence all the Saints deserve certain special honours, and all of them can be our powerful intercessors. But nevertheless we must not overdo things, even in devotion. We must not try to give all the Saints just the same honour. We may follow our personal leanings, or choose according to circumstances, invoking this or that Saint in a more particular manner, and among them our own patron Saint will be rightly put in the front rank.

III.

Let us now glance at the origin and development of the cultus of the Saints in the Church.

It has been asserted, as we have already

remarked, that the gods of paganism were changed into Saints, and that in the primitive Church the ignorant crowd of early Christians substituted for their heathen idols a fresh set with different names.

But this is not at all the fact: the cultus of the Saints is by no means founded on mere human superstition, but it comes down to us from that region of light where shines the divinity of Jesus Christ who lives in His Saints.

The public worship of the Saints at the outset was nothing else than the worship of the Martyrs, which included that of the Apostles. Among the disciples of Christ they alone received the homage of public veneration who had followed in the footsteps of the Master unto death, testifying to Him by the shedding of their blood.

"From the year 155 the believers of Smyrna, in a letter in which they relate the martyrdom of St. Polycarp, declare their intention of keeping his feast, the *dies natalis*, or 'birthday' of the Martyr, by a gathering at the place where his body rests. We find similar allusions in 'The Passion of St. Cyprian,' and in that of St. Saturninus. In the fourth century Prudentius also speaks of a Mass celebrated on the anniversary of the Martyrs, either in the basilica over their tomb, or in the crypt, or at the grave itself."*

And already the worship paid to the

* Dom Cabrol, *Ibidem*, 290.

Martyrs is not only the veneration of honour; they are invoked, and people have recourse to their intercession.

“Near the tombs of celebrated Martyrs in the catacombs are found *graffiti*, that is to say, inscriptions in chalk, or cut with a knife, by some pilgrim coming to implore their help, *e.g.*, ‘Pray for us because we know that thou art in Christ,’ or ‘Pray for thy father, thy mother, thy brothers, and thy sister,’ and the following at Calistus’s cemetery, ‘Blessed spirits, remember Marcianus and all your brethren.’

“In the diptychs of the Mass which are of primitive use, Saints and Martyrs are invoked, *e.g.*, Peter and Paul, Andrew, James . . . John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian, Felicitas and Perpetua, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, etc., . . . and St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century alludes to this passage and says: ‘Next, we make a memorial of those who have fallen asleep, of the holy Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs, that God may hearken to our prayers by their intercession.’ ”*

Thus in the early Church, as soon as a confessor of Christ had merited and obtained from competent authority recognition of his claim to rank as a martyr, the clergy and the faithful gathered on certain days at his tomb for the celebration of his cultus, and

* Dom Cabrol, *Ibidem*, 291.

even at other times people came thither to pray. In a general way, the martyrs were honoured and invoked.

When the era of the great persecutions was closed, the cultus paid to them took new forms. Christians liked to sleep their last sleep near their graves, and many sought to obtain their relics. These were divided and carried away to different churches, and even to people's homes; and in venerating them all sorts of favours and miracles were asked for and received.

But until the end of the fourth century scarce any except the martyrs were admitted to the honours of such worship. It was thought that shedding one's blood was the true and only way of taking a share in Christ's Passion and of obtaining a place on the altars of the churches. The sanctity of confessors, ascetics, bishops, and virgins, being less remarkable than the heroism of the martyrs, struck the minds of the faithful less, and therefore their worship was slower to develop and less solemn. Still they too were the friends of God, and consequently patrons and intercessors. And when the age of the persecutions was over, their mortified life was considered as an equivalent for martyrdom. "Is not the spotless service of a devout life a daily martyrdom?" writes St. Jerome.* Sulpicius Severus† reckoned

* *Vita Paulæ*, 31.

† Ep., ii, 12, 9.

that St. Martin had undergone martyrdom because the mortifications he had endured were as good as a real passion. Doubtless, he had not witnessed unto the blood; but then he had lacked any occasion for doing so. It is not right, said Sulpicius, for him to lose the glory of martyrdom, since so far as he could be one, he wanted to be a martyr and was one. Had he lived in the days of Nero or of Decius, he would not have hesitated to ascend the martyr's pyre.

There are traces of the cultus of Confessors from the fourth century. M. de Rossi quotes an epitaph of that period, and in it the title of confessor is quite clearly distinguished from that of martyr.*

As to virgins and holy women, those who were martyrs participated from the first in the honours of worship without any distinction from those paid to other martyrs. By degrees, while the custom of honouring and invoking confessors publicly was being introduced into the Church, the women martyrs attracted to themselves their sisters, who were virgins or holy women like themselves, but had not gathered the palm of martyrdom.

Thus was gradually formed the liturgical cycle of the feasts of the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins, and Holy Women.

In all this there is nothing of a heathen character; it is by no means a survival of

* *Bull.*, 1864, p. 30.

paganism. Doubtless, the Church has often replaced an idolatrous and unclean worship with a legitimate devotion, just as she has often inaugurated in a pagan temple the worship of the one true God, being satisfied with the cleansing of the building and the casting out of the idols. But in such cases God has merely resumed what was His own. The Church did not come to destroy religious sentiment, but to purify and uplift it.

In vain are attempts made to show us that Bacchus was transformed into St. Denis, the Celtic Mothers into Blessed Virgins, and that Isis, the virgin who was to conceive, is assimilated to the Mother of Christ. It is not impossible, indeed, that ancient statues of the gods may have received Christian veneration as the Saints whom they were taken to represent. Such transformations are only analogous to those of heathen temples transformed into Christian churches. What the Church often did with pagan temples is well known. When paganism was overthrown, its temples which were still standing were destined to be used in fresh ways. The Church appropriated them, and the faithful, giving up their idolatrous worship, now thought only of venerating the Saints in the very places where their ancestors had honoured false gods. The Pantheon in Rome, the Parthenon at Athens, afford two classic examples of such substitution.

Further, a material and purely outward bond between the new religion and the old consists in the way in which they make use of a certain number of common rites and symbols which we are accustomed to regard as specially peculiar to ourselves, and therefore we are surprised to find them possessed of an analogous significance in their polytheistic surroundings.

It would have been very astonishing if the Church, in her efforts to propagate her teaching in the midst of the Greco-Roman world, had made use of an entirely new language to convey her message to the people, and if she had systematically repudiated all the forms which had been employed for the expression of religious feelings until that time.

Within the limits imposed by the conditions of race or civilization, the ways of interpreting the impulses of man's heart do not vary indefinitely, and therefore it was only natural for religion in its new form to appropriate to itself certain parts of the old ritual, which only needed sane explanation in order to become the expression of the Christian soul raising itself up to the true God. All the signs which did not imply an acknowledgment of polytheism might find favour in its eyes, and if the new religion did not show any eagerness to adapt them formally to its own use, it did not make

any objection to them when they re-appeared as a means of giving expression to the religious feelings of the crowd.

Moreover, they were far more a spontaneous exhibition of the impulses of the soul than a borrowing from the older forms of worship. Certain attitudes betokening respect and used in prayer, the use of incense, lamps burning night and day in the sanctuary, ex-votos testifying to favours received, such are the perfectly natural manifestations of piety and thankfulness towards God, and their equivalent is to be found in all religions.

Hence it shows but little judgment to have recourse to the hypothesis of borrowing when human nature, acting under the religious impulse, provides an adequate explanation.

In conclusion, let us honour the Saints, invoke them with confidence, but also let us not forget that they are examples which we should do our best to imitate.

They were men like ourselves; we can therefore do what they have done. We have the same help, the same graces, the same means at our disposal; indeed, many of them had not at their command that abundance of spiritual resources which God has lavished upon us in His royal generosity.

What an encouragement it is to goodness to witness the ardour with which they exercised it ! What a source of strength in temptation, what a comfort in trouble, to see the glory with which God has rewarded them, and which He promises to us as well as to them ! Let their example fill us with courage. Let us bear in mind that they look down upon us from heaven, watching our efforts and assisting us with their powerful intercessions. And let us be convinced that the most pleasing honour we can pay them is to take them as our leaders, and to follow in their steps.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEVOTION TO THE HOLY SOULS

WE have studied the cultus of the Saints, our blessed brethren who are now in the full enjoyment of the happiness of heaven: but we must not forget the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

Is it true that Purgatory exists? What is it like? Can we, ought we to try to assuage the lot of those who grieve therein? Is it reasonable to have recourse to their help to obtain temporal or spiritual favours? Such are the four questions which we shall now inquire into.

I.

In vain do Protestants, following in the footsteps of the Albigensian heretics, deny the existence of Purgatory, recognizing after death only two abodes for men's souls, namely, heaven and hell. Catholics will always affirm the confession of faith of the Fathers of the Council of Trent:* *Constanter teneo purgatorium esse*, "I firmly believe in the existence of Purgatory."

* *Professio fidei Tridentinæ, Item Concil. Trid., Sess. vi, can. 30.*

This belief was already held by the Jews, and we find traces of it in the Old Testament. After the fight with Gorgias,* Judas Machabæus having found beneath the soldiers' tunics consecrated things belonging to the idols of Jamnia, though this was forbidden by the law, began to pray with his followers, begging that the sin of the slain might be entirely forgiven, and he "made a gathering" for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead that they might be loosed from them." Hence Judas and his men, that is to say, the Jews of his day, believed that the souls of some of the departed might be relieved by the prayers and sacrifices of the living; they admitted the existence of a place of expiation between heaven and hell.

When our Lord came into the world, did He who took care to rebuke them for their false interpretations of the Law and to correct their errors, reprimand them for believing in the existence of Purgatory and prayer for the dead? By no means: and yet He knew how general a practice this was. Therefore He must Himself have admitted it.

Doubtless, in the Gospels the word "Purgatory" is not to be found, nor is its existence explicitly affirmed. But Jesus certainly alludes to it when He says to the Pharisees: "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but

* 2 Mach. xii.

he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come."*

On the lips of Jesus "this world" referred, so far as mankind is concerned, to the time before the last Judgment, and so far as each individual is concerned, the time of his life in this world: "the world to come" signified eternity, which begins for each person after death, and for mankind after the end of the world. To declare that a sin will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come, is therefore one way of saying very plainly that it will never be forgiven. But it also enables us to infer† that certain sins can be forgiven in the world to come. And where in that other world is the place of their forgiveness to be found? Will it be in heaven? No: for it is written: "Nothing that is defiled shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Will it be in hell? No again: for we read that hell is the abode of the damned for ever and ever. Therefore it must be in an intermediate place, in Purgatory, and its existence must be admitted in order to explain the words of Jesus Christ.

In the same way as our Lord, St. Paul alludes to Purgatory in the third chapter of 1 Corinthians. Speaking of the labourers who work for the Master, and who will there-

* Matt. xii. 32.

† St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, l. xxi, cap. 24.

fore have a claim to be rewarded in eternity, he says: "The fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide . . . he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." Now this, according to Catholic interpreters, signifies that their souls will be saved, but that they will have to suffer for a time in the expiatory fires of Purgatory.

It must be acknowledged that the Scripture texts referring to Purgatory are rare, but those above quoted suffice to show that the Bible is not dumb as to the dogma we are now considering. As for the testimony of Tradition, it is ample.

Calvin's forced avowal is well known: "At the close of the third century the custom of praying for the dead had already arisen. . . . But in this," he says, "the early Christians were mistaken."*

Pace Calvin and his followers, this laudable custom was of still earlier date. It existed amongst the Jews, as we have already seen.† And in the primitive Church, about the close of the second century, Tertullian refers to it in these words: "Every year we make offer-

* *Institut. chrét.*, iii, 5, 10.

† Even to-day the Jews pray in their synagogues for the dead, but they do it for one year only, as, according to them, no soul can remain in Purgatory for more than that time.

ings to God for our departed."* In the same way we find a mention of Purgatory in the authentic Acts of St. Perpetua, which are, in the opinion of Künstle and of Bardenhewer, "the most ancient historical record of the African Churches." St. Perpetua had two visions. First, she saw her young brother Dinocrates, only lately dead, trying to reach a spring to quench his thirst. She understood that he was in a place of suffering, and prayed for him. Then she saw him, radiant with light, get to the spring and quench his thirst. "*Vidi Dinocratem refrigerantem.*" The latter expression, as Marucchi† remarks, is analogous to that which is often found in the Catacombs, "*in refrigerio,*" and is evidently an allusion to Purgatory.

Later on, in the third century, St. Cyprian wrote‡: "It is one thing to hope for forgiveness, another to enter into glory: it is one thing to go to prison to pay the uttermost farthing of debt before being set at liberty, another to receive immediately the reward of faith and virtue." How could the belief of the primitive Church in Purgatory be more clearly expressed?

There is no need to dwell upon the following centuries. One has only to run through

* *De Corona militis*, 3.

† *Eléments d'archéologie chrét.*, I, p. 41.

‡ *Epistola ad Antoniam*, n. 20.

the works of St. Cyril, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Basil, and the rest of the Fathers of the Church, to find frequent and still more explicit references to the doctrine.

Moreover, even if reason cannot prove to us that Purgatory exists, it nevertheless tells us that such a place is in perfect correspondence with the demands of justice, and that it is rightly postulated by the conscience. It is evident that amongst the multitudes who pass out of this life there must be vast numbers who are not holy enough for immediate admission into heaven, and not guilty enough to merit eternal damnation. They do not deserve hell because they have sincerely turned to God, were it only at the last moment of their lives, and they have obtained forgiveness. But still they could not enter directly into heaven, for they have done no penance while on earth, and the most elementary justice demands a certain amount of satisfaction, even for faults that have been pardoned. Then, too, there are unforgiven venial sins on the conscience, and nothing defiled can enter into the abode of God most holy.

Justice requires the existence of a place of expiation and purification between heaven and hell, in other words, the existence of Purgatory.

II.

What is the nature of the pains of Purgatory?

Of this we have no exact knowledge. But what is sure is this, that souls suffer unspeakable torments there. The writer of the *Imitation of Christ*,* summing up the opinions of many of the Saints, does not hesitate to say that "one hour of the torments of Purgatory will be more dreadful than years of the most rigorous penance on earth."

Doubtless, there are also very great joys in Purgatory. First of all, there is the joy of the certainty of eternal salvation. The holy souls do not yet see God, but they are sure of seeing Him one day. They have, therefore, no further fear or anxiety as to their eternal fate.

Then, what a joy they must feel to see their expiation being fulfilled every day and every moment, and the hour of their deliverance drawing near! There is none of the despair of hell, for the damned curse their sufferings, while souls in Purgatory bless theirs. They feel that they are suffering for God, and in order to be united to Him. They love God passionately, and we know how love transforms even the most

* Book I, i, 24.

painful things so as to make them easy to bear.

Furthermore, they are surrounded with charitable, gentle, and kindly souls who pity and encourage them. In Purgatory there is not the hatred that reigns in hell, but love prevails between all those who are there.

Then, many of the Saints tell us that the holy souls sometimes receive the visits of Angels and of the Blessed Virgin Mary to comfort them.

Hence Purgatory has its joys and consolations, but it has also astounding sorrows.

One of the most terrible pains is of a nature that we can hardly understand in this world, and this is the penalty of the privation of the sight of God. On earth we have no personal knowledge of God, and our notion of Him is too imperfect for us to suffer through being far from Him. Moreover, outward things occupy our attention with distractions, and therefore we feel our being at a distance from Him so little. But at the hour of death, when the things of this world are ceasing to take up our minds, God makes the soul aware of all His beauties and infinite perfections. Then the soul which is not entirely purified desires at once to rush towards Him, and an irresistible force holds it back, so that it feels repelled and kept far off. The pain of such a situation cannot

be fathomed by us. Our earthly affections are but dull, and yet those who have seen a father or mother or child taken away by death know how sorrowful is the separation that tears the beloved from one another. Yet such rendings apart are as nothing compared with those of the soul which finds itself separated from God. This God whose child we are, this God who died for us, we now discover how amiable He is, and desire to possess Him at once, and cannot do so. On earth we cannot possibly understand the severity of this torment.

We can more easily form an idea of the penalty of the senses, which resembles somewhat that which we feel in our flesh. Our sensibility quickly takes alarm at this. This suffering also exists, and that in a terrible form, in Purgatory; such is the general opinion. But we cannot tell what its nature exactly is. Most of the theologians of the Catholic Church speak of flames, of a real fire. If St. Thomas Aquinas is to be believed, it is identical with that of hell. But the theologians of the Greek Church admit rather of a merely metaphorical fire, such as "the fire of remorse, or of sorrow." On this point the Church has made no definition.

Nor has she declared whether it is true, as many of the Saints have thought, that the least of the pains of Purgatory surpasses

the greatest of those in this world. They are, however, indisputably terrible.

Moreover, it is clear that they must vary according to the debts that have to be paid, the sins that have to be expiated. Some of these debts, accumulated throughout a long life, may amount to ten thousand talents, to use the language of the Gospel, whereas others may be much smaller. Plainly, justice demands that the penalty shall be in proportion to the amount. The intensity of the suffering in the penalty of being deprived of the sight of God, as well as in that of the senses, will be according to the number, the character, and the gravity of the sins committed. And so must it be with the time the penalty endures.

How long does it last? No one can tell. It is a mystery which God has not thought it for our good to reveal. All that we know is that the pain of Purgatory will cease for all men after the last Judgment. Thenceforward there will only be heaven for the good and hell for the wicked.

III.

That it is in our power to give relief to those in Purgatory by our prayers and good works has been laid down by the Council of Trent, and all Tradition, even that of the Jews, declares it. That we should actually

exercise this power is God's will, and it is expected of us by the holy souls; it is also to our own advantage.

God Himself calls upon us to relieve them. It must not be supposed that it costs Him nothing thus to torment souls whom He has made in His own image and purchased with His blood. If He suffered and died for them while they were yet sinners, what would He not do for their happiness now that they love Him and are in His grace? When He sees their sufferings His loving-kindness urges Him to put an end to their afflictions, but He is checked by His justice. Hence He has to wait, but how heavily the time seems to drag! And then He turns to us who are still able to gain merits: "If you love me," He says, "I beseech you to pay the ransom of these beloved souls, so that I may be able to set them free."

But there should be no need of God's voice to stir our pity on behalf of the holy souls; their cry of distress should suffice. The time for merits is past in their case, and they can only wait and suffer, counting upon us. "Have mercy!" they cry out to us. "You cannot see anyone suffering close to you without feeling compassion and trying to assuage their sorrows. Have mercy upon us who are in such dire distress."

Above all do those whom we have known turn their suppliant looks towards us.

“O you,” they exclaim, “who have grieved so much for our sorrows and wept so much over our deaths, now you can do more for us than you ever did before. During our last illness, had you been able to moisten our burning lips, to strengthen our feeble limbs, to bring a beam of light to our darkened souls, how happy would you have been ! But now we are suffering more than we did then, and you can help to assuage our thirst, to strengthen our weakness, and to lighten the darkness of our gloom. . . . Have mercy upon our woes, and stay the arm of divine justice which is heavy upon us.”

Furthermore, our own interest bids us to hearken to the voice of these afflicted souls. God will reward us. He who has a recompense for a cup of cold water given in His name will not allow our charity to go without an immediate reward. And then, a day will come when, unless we are saints, we too shall go to that abode of sorrow to expiate our sins. He will then deal with us as we have dealt with others. He will put it in the minds of our relations and friends, perhaps into the minds of those who are unknown to us, to offer prayers and good works for our deliverance.—In the meantime those whom we have helped will themselves pray for us. And when they are in heaven, they will be our protectors with God. How could

they forget us when we have burst their bonds asunder? They could never do so. If gratitude is not always to be found on earth, it is not so in heaven. When they are once in heaven, these souls will pray for us our whole life long.

Let us not, then, resemble those who are satisfied with giving their relations a splendid funeral, and with looking carefully after their graves and decking them with flowers. When we receive the notice of anyone's death, we must not be satisfied with a few outward manifestations of sympathy with the bereaved family, we ought to pray for the soul of the departed. We should think of trying to bring relief to the holy souls.

Even sinners may assuage their distress by praying. God does not deny all favours to sinners. Whatever the man who was born blind may have said, He is ready to answer their prayers, and in many passages the Holy Scriptures exhort sinners to pray. If their prayers are not powerless in their own case, they are perhaps even more potent in the case of the holy souls. St. Thomas Aquinas, indeed, tells us that prayers for the dead are more easily heard than those for the living, because of the extreme necessity and impotence of the dead.

He adds* that the suffrages of sinners are not unprofitable to the departed. Not

* *Supplem.*, q. 71, a. 3.

only will God take account of the Masses they have said, but also of their alms, good works, and sufferings, if they do all these things in a spirit of faith, even though they may not be in a state of grace.

Further, there are weighty theologians, such as Bellarmine, Suarez, De Lugo . . . who think that sinners can gain indulgences for the departed when the Church does not include in the grant of indulgences the clause, "with at least a contrite heart," or "on condition of Confession and Communion." In this case, although the sinner is unable to gain any indulgence for himself, these theologians are of opinion that he can gain them for the holy souls.

But if sinners can relieve souls in Purgatory, how much more can those in a state of grace do so ! The great means at our disposal for that end are first of all prayers made for such an intention. One day when St. Bernard was praying for the holy souls, he, like Jacob, saw a ladder the top of which reached to heaven, while the bottom of it was set in Purgatory, and on this ladder souls were ascending, thanks to his prayers.

Amongst all other prayers, assisting at the Holy Sacrifice, and still more the offering of It up for their intention, hold the first place. When the priest takes the divine Victim in his hands, at the name of Jesus everything is moved, every knee bows, alike in heaven

and on earth. The souls in Purgatory experience relief amidst their sufferings, and often, completely purified by their Saviour's blood till they are whiter than snow and more spotless than light, they wing their way to glory.

Besides, we have at our disposal the sacrifices and penances which we can lay upon ourselves, and those which are laid upon us by the troubles and difficulties of life, accepted in a Christian spirit.

Lastly, there are partial and plenary indulgences. But in what measure the souls for whom we pray and make satisfaction are relieved we know not. This is God's secret. He alone accepts and redistributes our expiations, having regard to the treasures of His mercy and the requirements of His justice. We cannot tell how much is secured for this or that soul by a prayer, a Mass, an indulgence; we only know that God takes it into account, and that souls are really helped.

IV.

But can we ourselves really obtain favours by the intercession of the holy souls?

They will not forget their benefactors when they go to heaven, as we have already remarked. But, while still in Purgatory, can they pray for us and secure immediately temporal or spiritual favours?

The Church has laid down nothing on the subject. But Doctors and Saints commonly teach that they can. Although they cannot themselves merit because the time for meriting for themselves is over, they are beloved of God and can therefore pray for others and be answered. They can do so all the more on account of their misfortune, for it leads God to have mercy upon them and to grant them whatever He can accord them. Not being able to take account of their prayers on their own behalf, He is pleased to take account of them on behalf of others.

But, it will be said, they know not their benefactors, they are not like the blessed in heaven, they cannot see what is taking place on the earth. That may be so. But it is enough for them to feel the relief that we procure for them to call down on their benefactors the blessings of heaven, for God knows them whoever they may be. Besides, the holy souls often know from whom they get help in their sufferings. God allows their Guardian Angels or ours to tell them this comforting news. Such is the view of Suarez and Bellarmine, and it is confirmed by a quantity of private revelations.

From this pious and sound belief is derived the *private devotion* of the faithful to the holy souls. Many Saints have practised and recommended it. "When I want to obtain a favour," said St. Catherine of Bologna, "I

have recourse to the holy souls, and I feel that I am answered through their intervention." "If people knew," wrote the Curé d'Ars, "how great is the power of the holy souls in Purgatory over the heart of God, they would not be so forgotten. We ought to pray earnestly for them that they may pray earnestly for us." It is, then, a wise and Christian custom to offer a prayer, a good work, a Mass, for the departed, for the purpose of obtaining some special favour.

In conclusion, let us who are Christians never imitate those who are satisfied with shedding fruitless tears for the departed, with bedecking their graves and wearing deep mourning. A grief which is confined to such manifestations of regret savours almost of irony with regard to souls which need help so sorely and implore it so poignantly.

We shall pray for our departed and for the holy souls in general, we shall do works of satisfaction for their intention, we shall gain indulgences for them and have Holy Mass offered on their behalf. When they have reached heaven, and even while they are still in Purgatory, they will repay us a hundredfold in the heavenly favours which they have obtained for us.

CHAPTER XVII

ORDER IN DEVOTIONS

IN conclusion we have to consider one more question. Are all these devotions obligatory, and if a choice can be made, what order ought to be followed?

The advocates of some devotions are inclined to exaggerate. The one they commend is worth more than all the rest; it will infallibly secure eternal salvation, and without it one runs the risk of never reaching heaven.

Such excesses as these are always to be avoided. It is important to understand the relative value of various devotions, and that everyone is free to adopt a devotion or to leave it alone. This we shall now inquire into.

I.

Everyone knows that all that is strictly obligatory for remaining in a state of grace and for getting to heaven is faith, and obeying the commandments of God.

Hence one may be altogether a Christian, and even possess a high degree of virtue,—

witness the Saints of the first ages when subordinate devotions were far less numerous and much less held in honour,—provided that one fulfil not only one's general religious duties but also one's essential acts of piety, such as praying, hearing Mass, confession, and communion.

These acts of piety and general religious duties bind us to turn frequently to God. They are inseparable from a certain amount of devotion to the three divine Persons. Anyone who did not pay God and Jesus Christ a worship of faith, homage, and obedience would clearly be out of the way that leads to eternal happiness.

But are we also bound to honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels, and the Saints?

We certainly ought to believe in the sublime dignity and power of Mary, in the glory and power of the Angels and the Saints. But are we bound to pay them special homage, to have recourse to their intercession?

According to all the theologians we are not absolutely obliged to pay particular homage to the Angels and the Saints, far less to beg for their assistance, provided that we sincerely honour and invoke God. Strictly speaking, one may even be saved without honouring or praying to Mary, on condition that the omission does not proceed

from irreverence. No doubt, as all the Doctors agree, having a true devotion towards her is a sign of predestination. Indeed, many pious writers go so far as to say that Mary is the dispenser of all heavenly graces. The gifts of God are without repentance, and God the Author of grace was given to us through her, and therefore, say they, all graces are transmitted to us by her means. Not to honour and invoke her is then contrary to the divine plan and to the desire of God. Nevertheless devotion to Mary is not absolutely commanded under pain of damnation, and far less are devotion to the Saints and Angels thus ordered.

As for the secondary forms of such devotions, even when approved and encouraged by the Church, it is clear that they are not binding upon anybody. We are free to take them or leave them, to propagate them or not.*

* We ought to have the highest reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, but no one is bound to adore it in this or that particular manner, or in this or that particular place. It is a good thing to pay the greatest honour to the Sacred Heart, but no one is bound to practise the observance of the Holy Hour or of the Nine Fridays. In order to magnify Mary duly no one is bound to make any particular pilgrimage, to wear any special scapular, to repeat any set prayer in her honour. Some of the greatest Saints have shown wonderful devotion without these secondary observances.

But since these devotions are excellent in themselves, and since they may bring us most precious and abundant graces, if we neglect them we do ourselves the wrong of depriving ourselves of a great number of heavenly favours which are highly beneficial or necessary to us.

II.

One need only remember that in our devotions, as in everything else, there is an order to follow, a proper measure to be kept.

First of all, we should give the highest place in our esteem to those devotions which owe their pre-eminence to the dignity and importance of their object.

Who has not seen some people go into a church and kneel down at once before their favourite statue, and then leave without even making a genuflection to the Blessed Sacrament, without paying any tribute of honour to the King of Saints, the God who dwells within the tabernacle?

No enlightened Christian will imitate their

As to devotions not approved by the Holy See or by the Bishops, they clearly should be avoided. There is no need to speak of those strange and scandalous devotions that consist in saying rosaries, lighting candles, or wearing medals for success in some wicked enterprise; they are simply aberrations of the moral sense.

example. He knows that God cannot abdicate His rank as supreme Lord, or yield to any other the first place, without ceasing to be God. The devotions which are directly addressed to the three divine Persons, and especially to the Word incarnate, will therefore claim His chief attention.

The Eucharist has a place of its own, because it contains Christ Himself in His entirety under the appearances of bread and wine. There we have His body, His soul, His virtues, and His divinity. Our primary devotion, then, should be to visit and receive our Lord in the venerable Sacrament of the altar as often as possible.

After the devotion to our Lord, that to our Lady has quite a special importance of its own. This devotion may not be attached to any particular form, but it may also take shape in the most varied guise according to the sanctuaries where the Blessed Virgin is honoured, according to the particular mystery of her life which is its end, according to the special virtue or aspect of intercessory power which one desires to venerate in her. The actual form matters little; each of the faithful chooses according to his needs and leanings. The important thing is to honour Mary more than the other Saints.

St. Joseph, too, deserves a privileged place. He was Jesus' guardian, the Protector of the Church, and souls are being increas-

ingly drawn towards him during these latter centuries. He has right to a special position.

Then come the Angels and the Saints, especially our own Patron Saints, and those to whom our hearts are drawn.

III.

Thus some devotions are naturally inferior to others. Still, it must be noted that their fundamental manifestations are sometimes more important than the secondary manifestation or derivative form of some superior devotion.

For instance, it would be better not to cherish the devotion toward this or that particular mystery of our Lord's life than to have no devotion towards the Blessed Virgin Mary. It would be wiser not to wear such and such a medal of our Lady than to fail to honour St. Joseph or one's Guardian Angel.

We must not forget that if one devotion is higher than another through its object, it may still be less profitable for a certain individual, just as for some constitutions foods which are very strengthening by nature are not always the most wholesome. The best devotions for each of us are those which we find best for correcting our faults, for the daily acquisition of better habits, and which,

in stirring us to fresh endeavour, make us exchange lukewarmness for fervour, selfishness for self-sacrifice, slackness for courage and generosity, and in a word make us better men and women.

Hence, in choosing our devotions we should largely take into account our personal needs, and, as these vary from time to time according to our changing circumstances, it is well to remember that even the devotions we have adopted do not restrict our freedom. We may pass, as circumstances may demand, from one to another. To-day we venerate the Holy Childhood of Jesus, to-morrow His Sacred Heart; but in either case it is to Jesus that we find our way, and in Him we find God.

To-day we invoke the Blessed Virgin, to-morrow St. Joseph or some other Saint; but in every case we are trying to get the same supernatural life. The Church herself by the succession of her feasts and of the liturgical year sets before us this spiritual freedom. She leaves it to us to make a wise selection in harmony with our inclinations, our times, our own soul's highest good, and our neighbour's greatest edification.

IV.

We should also try to take account of any providential signs in choosing our devotions.

“At the beginning in the Catacombs, when the faithful were broken, crushed, and trodden under foot, and led to the scaffold, the great devotion was that to Jesus who had risen from the dead, to the divine Jonas who had come out of the whale’s belly, to the divine Orpheus who could bind the wild beasts with His spell, and who was to build the Church to the music of His lyre. This is what we see upon the walls of the Catacombs, never the cross, the scourging, the face which was spat upon, but the lyre, the crosier, the lovely resurrection robe, the fascinating youthful figure with none of the marks of time or the ravages of death upon it. In the days of the rack and the stake devotion took these forms of faith and hope.

“Constantine appears, and Christianity ascends the throne. Christians walk amidst honours and pleasures: what is the devotion that then fills their thoughts and takes possession of their souls? The devotion to the cross. Amidst their sufferings their devotion turned towards triumph! In their joys they turn to the cross! The cross comes forth out of the ground in which it had lain hidden for three centuries; it stretches forth its two arms, and on it mounts the divine Crucified One covered with blood and wounds. These peoples who were being threatened with the de-

cadence of the Lower Empire, these barbarians who came with their hands full of brutality and violence, required such rough blows of God to arouse or to soften them, this searching revelation of infinite love under suffering. The devotion to the cross, to the crown of thorns, to the nails, to the pillar, to the hands and feet transfixed with love, prevailed throughout the fall of the Roman Empire and the invasion of the barbarians. It enters into men's souls, it touches them, it so fires them with love that all the Christian nations are aroused, and are set marching to deliver the tomb of Jesus Christ; and the sight of Jerusalem draws tears from their eyes, and these rough soldiers sob till they lose consciousness or even die.

“By degrees under this holy influence minds are raised and souls are touched. And then another devotion arises, a still more profound devotion which strikes the senses and goes more deeply to the heart, which presupposes in the peoples a still tenderer, a more inward faith: this is the devotion to Jesus hidden in the Holy Eucharist. A Pope orders the Blessed Host to be raised at Holy Mass at the moment of consecration to call the faithful to a more explicit adoration. Another Pope institutes the beautiful processions of Corpus Christi. A third asks the two greatest geniuses of his time, St.

Bonaventure and St. Thomas, to draw upon their stores of charity and faith, and to compose hymns high enough to express the universal enthusiasm. A holy monk, carried away with the all-dominating movement, breathes forth his aspirations in the fourth Book of *The Imitation of Christ*. And the Church, as if renewed and rejuvenated by these fresh splendours, prepares resolutely to face the terrible trials that lie before her.

"A few centuries pass by; and now comes another and a more refined devotion, which assumes the existence of a still more spiritual type of soul, prepared by the holy Eucharist to understand all the tender subtleties of our Lord's affection: this is the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This too comes down from heaven, and springs up from the depths of the earth. It comes when the hour is ripe, and helps Christians as a whole to make a step forward, a true advance in love."*

God inclines souls during different ages towards this or that particular devotion, in the same way as He accords to certain Saints certain special powers or privileges, to such and such a centre for pilgrimages an abundance of miracles during a greater or less length of time. It is only wise to

* Bougaud, *Le christianisme et les temps présents*, iv, 233-235.

take account of such providential manifestations as these.

But those are not to be followed who are always running after something new or strange, and, always rejoicing in getting away from the beaten track, who fling themselves thoughtlessly into taking up with any new form of devotion they come to hear of. The older and more universal forms always retain their value and importance.

V.

There is only one more thing to be said: we must not overload ourselves with the practice of secondary devotions.

Let us not be like the sham devotee of whom Père Monsabré* writes: "She is intemperance personified, and cannot control her fancies. She is never satisfied with any amount of pious exercises. . . . She sets too high a value upon minutiae, and thinks she is unfaithful if she cannot do everything. She falls into a kind of superstition that binds her to practices which are useless and lead her to neglect or to scamp the more serious acts that form the very foundation of the spiritual life. For instance, she will rapidly run through the essential dispositions for confession or Communion in order to

* *Or et alliage dans la vie dévote*, 172-174.

recite a set quantity of forms which she has marked out for herself. . . . Her prayers, examens, and spiritual readings will suffer for it before she will omit some peculiar rosary, or the Crown of the Seven Dolours, or a host of insignificant details that should never have any part in the régime of the interior life until its main outlines have been firmly laid down."

"When the Church approves any devotion, she does so in order to help souls, not to burden them. But devotions would become a weariness and a hindrance to life if they increased to the point of overloading it, if they tyrannized over and enslaved the soul. Through being too numerous they would swallow up in prayers and meetings the hours strictly required for pressing duties; through lengthy exercises and the recitation of interminable formularies, they would wear down the soul to utter dryness; they would give rise to the painful impression of overdoing it which breeds disgust,"* they would engender formalism, and injure the performance of one's proper work.

Nature has its limits in the spiritual order as well as in the temporal. Amidst the vast number of practices intended to help and sustain it, devotion has to make her choice in such a manner as to avoid being over-

* Guibert, *La piété*, p. 271.

burdened by a plethora that would only produce weariness and impotence.

Let us learn how to put order and measure into our devotions. But let us never forget that devotions wisely used are an excellent means of advancing God's glory and our own increasing sanctification.



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